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August 2015

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Lonely Planet Magazine India provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

- by publishing information on all appropriate travel suppliers and not just those who provided us with assistance
- by never promising to offer anything in return, such as positive coverage.

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This Month's Cover



Norway's one of those unearthly places – between the fjords, the Northern Lights and the incredible roads, it's like something out of a fantasy movie.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPH (PUDUCHERRY): JEREMIAH CHRISTIAN AND RAO



Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor

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Kenya



Sintra, Portugal

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Yes, I'm a scaredy-cat.

I'm not the most physically-inclined of people, being naturally clumsy and prone to injuring myself in ways that have scientists offering me millions if I'd consent to being a test subject. I definitely don't like heights – apart from that little voice that goes, "Hmm, I wonder what will happen if I jump?", I have no desire to go bungee-jumping. I quake just a little every time I don breathing gear and duck my head underwater, I'll always be the suspiciously polite one letting others go ahead in the queue for the roller-coaster (and the one with a grim face once on it). And yet, somehow, I've chosen a job where I'm expected to zipline over thousand-foot drops, go diving with sharks, and go up in stunt planes, where being upside-down is actually the most relaxing part of the experience.

Just for once, I'd like a quiet life.

However, since that is not my destiny, I commanded my long-suffering team to come up with a list of things even I could do. They've managed to sneak in some things that make me roll on the floor laughing, like the **GR20** trek in Corsica – quite gorgeous but also Europe's toughest trek – but, for the most part, they've kept in activities that are fun, memorable and yet not terrifying. Want to go **kayaking in the moonlight**? Or **whale-watching in New Zealand**? Or **playing at being a cowboy** in Montana? How about a drive on one of the **most glorious roads in the world**, in Norway? Or even just hiking through tea plantations in Sri Lanka, with the promise of a cuppa at the end – now *that* sounds doable.

Thus, ladies and gentlemen of a relaxed nature, here's our list of **Easy Adventure** travel – easy even to do with a paunch and a tendency to flop down in corners with books. Loosely paraphrasing a great Chinese chef who said, "If I can do it, so can you!"



WHAT WE'VE LEARNT THIS ISSUE

1. In Mandleshwar, MP, people offer a *puja* to Albert Einstein every April.
2. That certain *dhabas* along the Mumbai-Pune highway offer emu chilli. (Better order a portion).
3. That you can learn *Bharatnatyam*. In Turkey. On a beach. Which is a butterfly sanctuary.
4. That in Maheshwar, MP, you can eat jam made by a royal.

Croatia



Puducherry



Java, Indonesia



Please recycle when done with the magazine

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Hong Kong
worth
₹2 lakh

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KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

Here's a quick guide to the sections and elements in our magazine, so you can max out your travel experience – and a menu of what's new in LPMI 2.0



Globetrotter

The jam-packed Globetrotter section brings you closer to the world through photo features, cutaways, interviews with travel buffs, food and other tidbits, and also offers sage travel advice in the form of Q&As and news on deals and upcoming festivals. **Pg 33**



The Photo Story

You can't really get much clearer than that name – a photographic journey that explores an interesting facet of a destination – architecture, wildlife, the great outdoors, food and drink... they all find their space here! **Pg 34**



Arrivals

From fun events and festivals around which you can plan your trips, to cool offers from across the globe and handy apps to make your trips simpler, if it's happening in the world of travel, you'll find it here. **Pg 40**



Postcards

This is your section entirely: we invite you, our readers, to send in photographs of special moments on your travels, little events or vistas that struck a chord or made you laugh. Tell us what you were doing there, and how this photograph came to be. Best of all, you don't need to be a professional photographer to be featured here. **Pg 10**



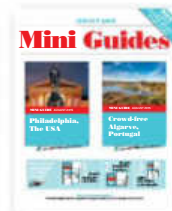
Easy Trips

'Easy' is the operative word here. These trips are extremely simple to plan and head out on at short notice. Typically weekend trips from the larger cities in India, all our destinations are easily accessible. We also have a 'Go Now' badge: these trips are generally seasonal, and often linked to upcoming festivals or events. **Pg 49**



Features

These are our longer, more elaborate stories, which get under the skin of a place. Each feature has a Make It Happen section; a practical guide with all the information you need to plan out this trip. This includes, where possible, the ideal, step-by-step itinerary to best enjoy a destination: take it to your agent, and off you go! **Pg 69**



Mini Guides

A hugely practical set of guides to cities or regions for you to tear out, fold and keep in your bag. Each Mini Guide contains a detailed map, hotel and restaurant listings, a slice of things to do and see, plus other useful info (Indian embassies abroad, currency, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, etc). **Pg 127**

KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE



Location:
Offers access to
the relevant map

EASYTRIPS THEKKADY, IDUKKI, KERALA



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (508km)
Closest city: Kochi (157km)
Closest airport: Cochin International Airport (143km). AirAsia, Jet Airways, Air India, Spicejet and IndiGo fly to Kochi from Bangalore (return fares from ₹ 3,455).
Closest railhead: Kottayam (KTYM; 107km). Take the daily 16526 Kanyakumari Express

(leaves Bangalore City Junction Station [SBC] 8pm, arrives KTYM 8.55am; ₹ 995 Third AC) and return by the daily 16525 Bangalore Express (leaves KTYM 4pm, arrives SBC 7.20am; ₹ 995 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

All hotels can arrange transfers from the airport. We liked the services of **Travelcart India** (00-91-484-2663533; www.travelcartindia.com, mail@travelcartindia.com; from ₹ 2,000/ day for an AC car).



Moovattupuzha, Ernakulam District).

MEDICAL AID

The nearest hospital to Mayapott is **St John Hospital** (00-91-4868-272230; stjohns.co.in; Kattappana), while **St Augustine Hospital** (00-91-4869-222042; Spring Valley, Kumily) is close to the other two properties.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Kids might enjoy an elephant ride through the plantations at **Elephant Junction** (00-91-4869-224142; Farm Tourism, Murukkady, Kumily; 9am – 5.30pm; ₹ 400/ 30-minute ride).

GOOD TO KNOW

* Periyar Tiger Reserve: 00-91-4869-224571; www.periyartigerreserve.org; Information centre, Ambadi Jn, Kumily; entry: ₹ 33 adult, ₹ 5 child upto 12, nature walk: ₹ 1,200 for upto four people for a three-hour walk, boat ride: ₹ 225 adult, ₹ 75 child upto 12 years
* For a bit of local culture, head out to Kadathanadan Kalari & Navrasa Kathakali Centre in Kumily, where you can feast your eyes on a theatrical kathakali performance or a dramatic kalaripayattu (traditional martial arts) show (00-91-9961740868, 00-91-4869-222988; www.kalaripayattu.co.in; Thekkady Rd, Kumily; kalaripayattu show: 6pm – 7pm, kathakali show: 5pm – 6pm, 7pm – 8pm; ₹ 200/ show).



WHERE TO STAY

Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House: 00-91-4869-263777, 00-91-9446023259; www.aanavilasam.com, aanavilasam@gmail.com; Pathumury-Aanavilasam Rd; closed from May 1 – Jul 15; from ₹ 6,500 (Jul 15 – Sept 30) with breakfast, rates vary as per season

Indhrivanam: 00-91-9633110645; www.indhrivanam.com, mail@indhrivanam.com; Valiyapara Rd, Chakkupallam, Kumily; ₹ 6,500 (Mar – Sept) with breakfast, afternoon snacks and dinner

Mayapott: 00-91-486-2223577; www.mayapott.com, bookings@spicetreeunnar.com; Kadamakuzhy, Vallakadavu; from ₹ 12,500 (May 1 – Sept 30) with breakfast and dinner and in-house activities, rates vary as per season



WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House serves a set meal for dinner and has

a limited à la carte menu for lunch (dinner: ₹ 1,000/ person). **Indhrivanam** serves mouth-watering vegetarian home-cooked food (included in the tariff), but doesn't serve lunch. **Mayapott** offers delicious local cuisine with a few Indian dishes on offer (lunch or dinner: ₹ 650/ person).



SHOPPING

You can buy cardamom from the plantation at **Mayapott** (as per daily rate) and home-grown coffee beans at **Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House** (from ₹ 300/ 500g).



WHAT TO PACK

Rain gear, light jacket, comfy shoes and motion-sickness medication



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

About two hours into the drive, **Sicilia Hotel** is a good loo and refreshment stop about two hours into the drive (near KSRTC Station, Thodupuzha), as is **Hotel Paray Residency**, about three hours into the drive (Main Central Rd,

Above: Cocooned in a 100-acre cardamom plantation, Mayapott is quaint and private
Below: Thekkady is an ideal place for bird-watching



MAP: JASJITHAN PATEL



Websites:
Indicates that websites
on that page are active



Watch out for more interactivity in the magazine

Whether you've got a travel question or want to show off your stunning photos or insider knowledge of a destination, get in touch at lpmagazine@wmm.co.in.



Food trail through Puducherry

BON APPÉTIT

When fresh baguettes are on the breakfast menu, it's easy to forget you're in South India. In Puducherry, a former French colony, however, they are de rigueur required by etiquette. Often called the Riviera of the East, Puducherry is just three hours from Chennai and a fascinating mélange of French and Tamil culture. The city's foodscape is just as unique, with meals that are ingredient focused and heavily influenced by both its past and current inhabitants, many of whom are artisanal food producers. Begin your eating frenzy before you even hit Pondy by making a short detour to **Tamir** (near Puducherry Airport;

see *Where to Eat* for all details). It grows its own vegetables, makes its own pasta and all the recipes come from the Italian proprietor Daniel Emdin's mother. Not surprisingly, everything tastes as good as when mamma makes it. It's best known for its delicious, thin crust wood-fired pizza (₹ 280 for a small Spicy), but the seafood risotto (₹ 330) is also pretty good. Once in the city, park yourself at **New Banana Café**, a rooftop café with a relaxed, boho vibe. Order a galette, a savoury crêpe made from buckwheat, stuffed with tomatoes, cheese and olives (₹ 160), and wash it down with

Above: Pick up fine French pastries and macarons to go at **Kalari Street**. Below: Kitschy wares for sale at **Nirvana** store at **Café Des Arts**.



refreshing mint hibiscus lemonade (₹ 80). It's a good thing that this coastal enclave is made for walking – stop by at the local chocolaterie and you'll know why. At **Zuki's**, the pakoras (₹ 35) are made of nuts covered in chocolate, and the hot chocolate (₹ 110) arrives with a spoon made of chocolate and two cubes of, yes, grated chocolate, to be mixed into an already delicious-looking beverage. Much like the city itself, Puducherry's food marries fine French cuisine with distinct local flavours. Check how well it does at **Café Blanc**, tucked inside the lovely Hotel de l'Orient. The weekly-changing menu is largely continental; try the white chicken curry (₹ 550).



GREAT FROM
Bangalore, Chennai

GREAT FOR
Foodies and Francophiles

GO NOW
To escape the rain.

Skip your hotel breakfast for a lazy petit déjeuner at **Café Des Arts**, a whimsical café in a converted Franco-Tamil house with a gallery, a library and a cycle rickshaw in the garden. It does the delightfully-named croque monsieur, a ham and cheese grilled

sandwich, well (₹ 210). Get the croque madame if you'd like it with egg (₹ 230). Evenings are best spent on the promenade. Stroll down to **Le Café**, famous for its organic South Indian coffee – order it cold (from ₹ 60) – and if you can't snag a picnic table, head upstairs for the best sunset views and people-watching. It stays open late so it's just the place to sate midnight cravings and listen to the crashing waves. Stave off any homesickness with a meal at **Hotel Sri Kamatchi**, an unpretentious joint with fabulous Tamil food. Mop up the vanjaran curry with fluffy kal dosai (₹ 150 for the combo), or try the fish kamatchi (₹ 150) and unusual chicken

1. The French Quarter is lovely, quaint and perfect for strolling.
2. Wood-fired pizza fresh out of the oven at **Tamir**.
3. Try the home-made hibiscus lemonade at **New Banana Café**.
4. The Tamil spread at **Hotel Sri Kamatchi** is legendary.
5. **Café Des Arts** is quirky inside and out.

utrapam (₹ 140). The veg offerings are yummy, and the pool and chutneys good enough to make a meal of. Extend your holiday a little longer by stopping for a leisurely meal at **Serenity Beach**. **Theruvu Flag** is a little slice of paradise, with chic decor and splendid views out to sea. Cool off with the gazpacho (₹ 210), move on to the catch of the day off the grill (from ₹ 470) and end with a delicious scoop (₹ 100) from Aurville's gelato man Francesco, who makes everything from scratch, using only natural ingredients.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTIANNO RAO

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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



KRABI, THAILAND Bay watch

Dr Deepthi Singh Gupta recommends a beach vacation in Krabi, Thailand

What worked: With an endless coastline along the Andaman Sea in southern Thailand, Krabi is home to hip beaches, pocket-friendly dining, island-hopping and spectacular views of the sea with limestone formations jutting out magnificently. We stayed at the Centara Grand Beach Resort & Villas surrounded by a national park, overlooking a private beach. Kayaking, snorkelling and other watersports activities are available in-house. If you want a break from beach activities, elephant safaris and a trip to the bustling Ao Nang Market are a good idea. Nature lovers will be thrilled here, but stay away from the deceptively charming monkeys.

What didn't: Krabi has nothing new to offer for those who've visited other places like Phuket – it is just quieter and less touristy. Our hotel was a bit secluded, approachable only by the hotel-run boat. The long tail boats, as romantic as they sound, end up hurting your back and wallet alike if you aren't careful, negotiate.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Centara Grand Beach Resorts & Villas; reservations: 00-66-2101-1234; www.centarahotelsresorts.com; Ao Nang, Amphur Muang



UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN Luxury on a lake

Chavi Agarwal from Meerut recommends splurging on a stay at The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur

What worked: The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur, is located on the banks of Lake Pichola overlooking the City Palace and spread over a luxurious 50 acres, including a 20-acre wildlife sanctuary, home to deer and wild boar. The hotel has amazing architecture, lake views, gardens and is one of the best places to go for an exotic vacation. The wonderful hospitality made our first visit to Udaipur very special. The service was truly excellent and the food fantastic. You can have dinner by the lakeside while enjoying Rajasthani folk dances in Chandni Mahal or indulge in a private dinner. A must-do here is the peaceful shikara ride around the lake as well as the private yoga session. Don't miss the ayurveda spa either.

What didn't: It's hard to point out what didn't work, but it would be great if there were more Indian sweets on the food menu.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: reservations: 00-91-11-23890606; www.oberoihotels.com; reservations@oberoihotels.com; Haridasji Ki Magri, Udaipur

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS
IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here, express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

**PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS
OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW
OR SUGGEST**

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to lpmagazine@wmm.co.in

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Postcards, letters
and reviews

Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





MARRAKESH, MOROCCO

Catching some rays

I decided to leave the grey skies of wintry England behind and jump on a flight to Marrakesh. This image was taken on New Year's Day, when I wanted to clear my head by walking around the local *souqs*. The colours and smells were amazing, the odour of pungent spices and tobacco hanging in the air. The locals were shopping and going about their daily business. I found the light coming through the roof slats so beautiful, almost Biblical. I loved Marrakesh – it was so different and I found it completely awe-inspiring. Next stop, Vietnam...



Alasdair Boyle is a keen amateur photographer from East Sussex.

There are 18 *souqs* in Marrakesh, historically divided into areas specialising in particular goods, from leather to carpets, pottery to food

Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





Why not get involved? We'd love to include your best new travel photos (at 300dpi) and the inspiring stories behind them. Send them with a pic of yourself to lpmagazine@wrm.co.in



POSTCARDS



Pebble Beach in Nice makes for a beautiful picnic spot on a sunny day

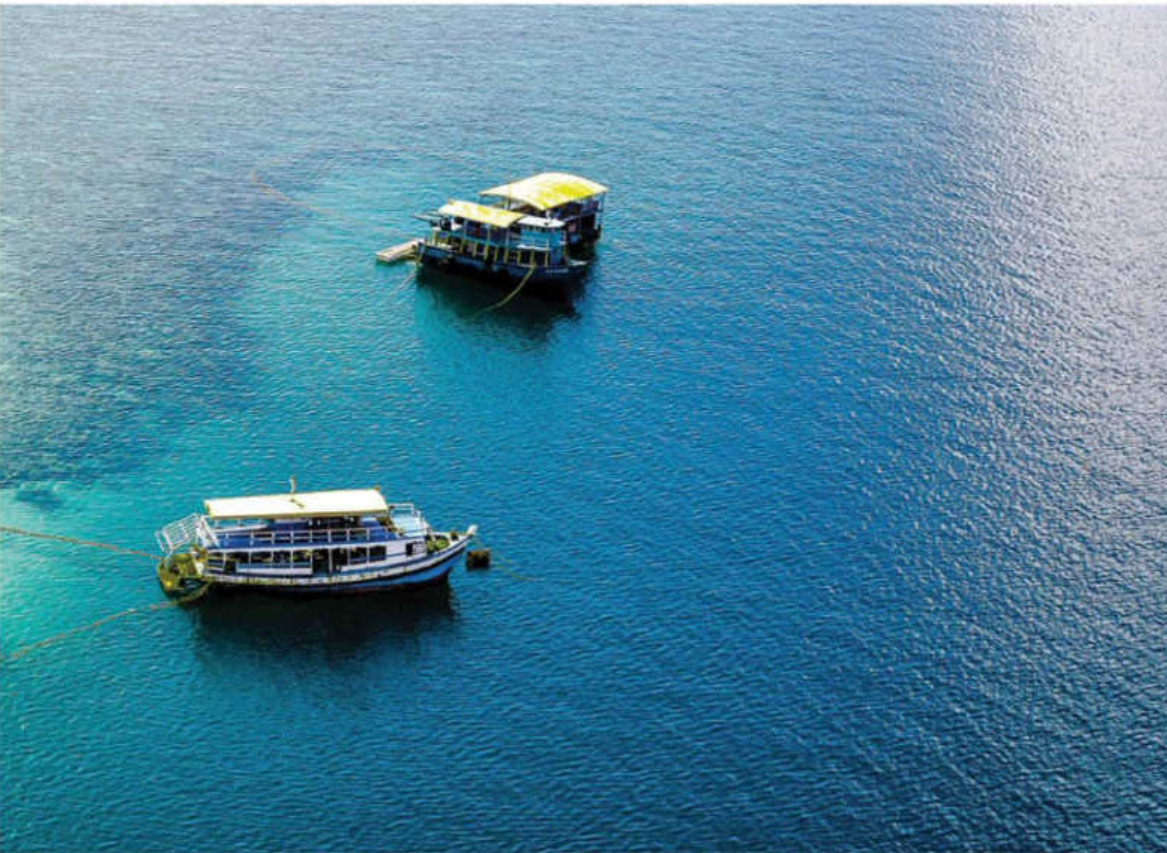
NICE, FRANCE

X marks the spot

People seldom look up while walking. I captured this photograph while wandering through the back alleys of Nice. Incidentally, while standing at the intersection of two narrow streets, I happened to peer skywards and noticed the 'X' formed by the buildings. The image was only made more beautiful by the old buildings, so full of character.



When he isn't working, Seattle-based **Bharat Ranjan** indulges his twin passions of travel and photography.



ANDAMAN ISLANDS, BAY OF BENGAL

Bolt from the blue

I saw these boats while flying over the Andaman Islands in a helicopter. Anchored in the middle of the rippling turquoise waters, the boats appeared deserted; the fishermen had probably returned home with the day's catch. Thanks to its thriving marine life, as well as years of isolation and the almost complete absence of commercial fishing, the waters around the Andaman Islands are abundant in a variety of quality fish.



Lt Cdr Pooja Rajput is an Indian naval officer who enjoys adventure sports.

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands were occupied by the Japanese for more than a few months during WWII – from 1942 to 1945

KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

Crossing paths

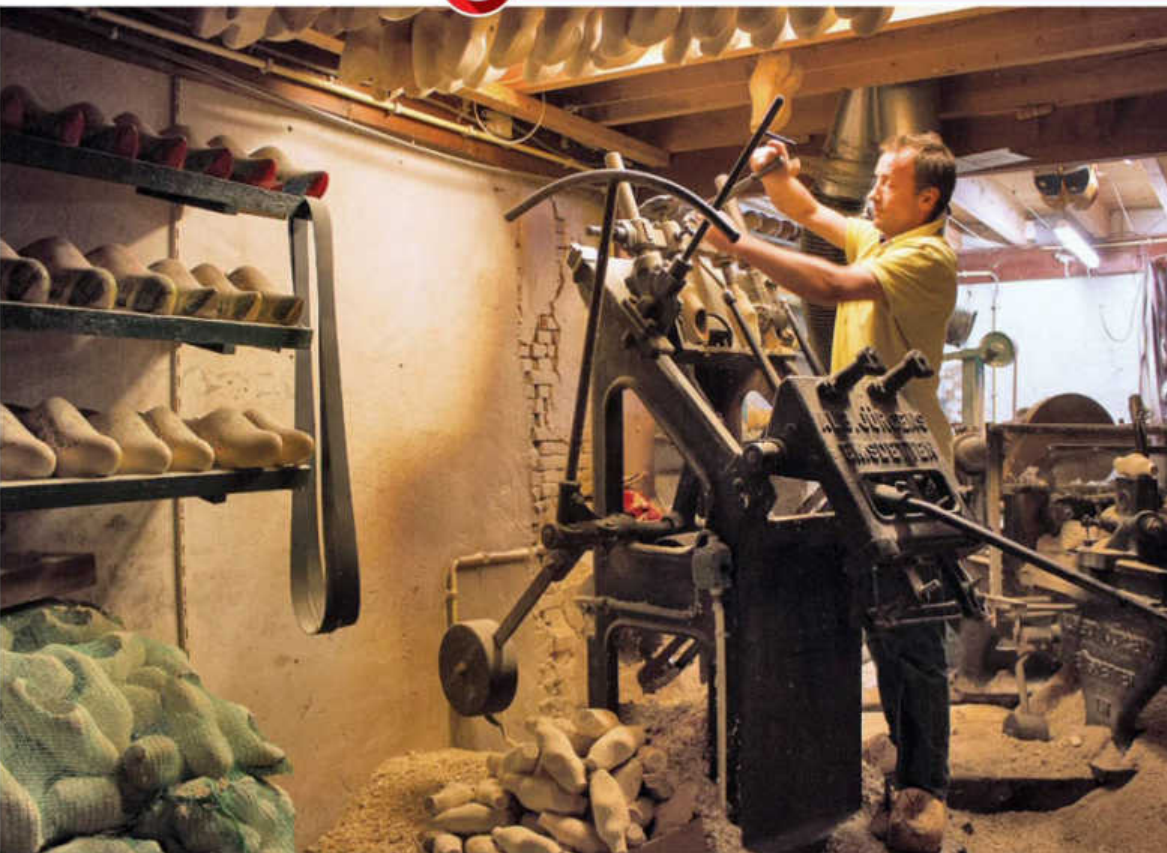
I shot this photograph early one winter morning near Victoria Memorial, where the tram line runs across Maidan. These two trams happened to cross each other on the parallel lines as I was waiting there, giving me this image. Moreover, the *puchkawalla* (*pani puri* seller) carrying his goods walked into the frame at that moment, bringing together the whole picture and giving the viewer a feel of the Kolkata of yore.



Ayan Mukherjee is a professional photographer based in Kolkata.



Running since 1902, the Kolkata tram is the only operating tram network in India and the oldest operating electric tram in Asia



The word Amsterdam comes from the combination of Amstel (the river) and dam (a dike or dam used to hold back the sea)

AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS **Clogged up**

I spent the summer of 2015 studying Amsterdam's home-based industries. Here, at the Rembrandt Hoeve, farmer Roel makes *klompen* (whole feet clogs), his skilled hands cutting the wooden shoes from a block of wood, just like in the olden days. He then polishes them and carves various designs. You can choose from bespoke clogs, or even get your name engraved on them. You can't bring home a better souvenir from Amsterdam.



Dr Shouptik Basu from Kolkata loves exploring new cuisines and cultures.

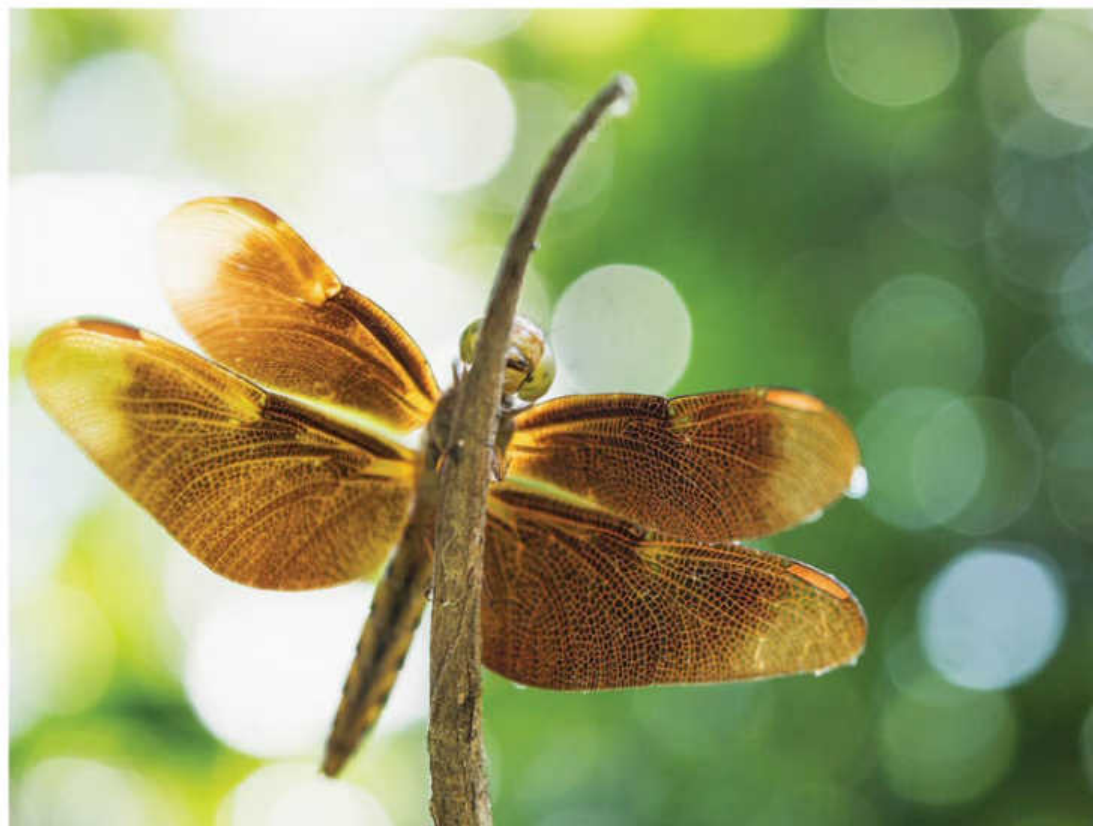
GUWAHATI, ASSAM

Winged wonder

I took this photograph in the backyard of my home in Guwahati. I was standing beneath a tree when I saw this dragonfly hovering above me. I ran inside and returned with my camera, by which time the creature had settled itself on a twig. I moved slowly towards it and took the photograph, the brilliant light and the tree above forming a great shot.



Sayan Sen is a student from Kolkata



Assam's Jonbeel Mela is held every year in January. It is a fair where the tribes barter their produce; no money is involved



The seat of the government, the Tashichho Dzong is open to visitors in the evening, once business hours are over

THIMPHU, BHUTAN Guiding lights

This is the Tashichho Dzong (or Thimphu Dzong), which is located on the banks of the Wangchhu River. *Dzongs* are historical forts that were established by warlords a few centuries ago. In those days, these structures used to serve as defensive forts. This *dzong* has been the seat of the government since 1952 and currently houses the throne room and offices of the king, the secretariat and the ministries of home affairs and finance.



Ashwani Kumar is an Indian Foreign Service officer who visited Bhutan earlier this year.

ANNAPURNA, NEPAL Visiting the namesake

I am named after the Annapurna mountain peaks, and so began my two-week trekking trip in the region by climbing to Annapurna Base Camp with my mum. After reaching camp, we returned to Pokhara to relax. Phewa Lake is the centre point of Pokhara. In the background, you see the foothills of the Himalayas, and the calmness of the lake will always remind me of the peace I found in Nepal.



Annapurna Mellor spent a year backpacking through Asia.



Hiring a colourful *doonga* (boat) for the day is a popular way to explore Phewa Lake and see the reflection of the Annapurna peaks



The valleys around Lauterbrunnen inspired JRR Tolkien's watercolours of Rivendell in *The Lord of the Rings*

BERNESE OBERLAND, SWITZERLAND **Snappy valley**

Last summer my family and I left our Canadian home to embark on a long road trip through the Alps. While hiking in Switzerland, we came across this unbelievable panoramic view. As we trekked down the mountain path, we had to stop several times to admire the rustic wooden Alpine chalets and snowcapped mountains, draped against the intense blue sky. Our children were so excited – they said they felt as though they were on an epic quest in a mystical land.



Lee Mailer lives in Alberta, Canada, but travels frequently to Europe.

VARANASI, UTTAR PRADESH

Show of strength

An *akhada*, or wrestling gym, is one of the few places where Hindu men from all castes are considered equals. Aside from bodybuilding, practitioners adopt a life of discipline and celibacy. I captured this photograph of a *pehelwan* (wrestler) in Varanasi. While *akhadas* around India are slowly disappearing, it's a relief to see them thriving here.



Kolkata-based **Somnath Chatterjee** is an award-winning photographer.



Varanasi is regarded as one of Hinduism's seven holy cities



Kielce was home to four Nazi concentration camps during WWII

KIELCE, POLAND

Trot along

I took this shot of a traditional horse carriage at the beautiful Muzeum Wsi Kieleckiej in Poland. After having toured the museum and looked at the windmills and old chapels, I started wondering what life must have been like centuries ago. That's when I spotted this man in his carriage, which instantly took me back to a time when things were so much simpler and we were much closer to nature.



Mumbai-based **Karan Arora** is a media professional and DIY travel enthusiast.

FUJI KAWAGUCHIKO, JAPAN

Hide & seek

We stayed in a *ryokan* facing Mount Fuji for two days, but did not get a glimpse of the mountain because it was cloudy all throughout. Disappointed, we decided to check out early and continue on the rest of our trip through Japan. However, while getting ready, I looked outside and saw the clouds drift away, and quickly took this picture. The Japanese say – Fuji *san* shows himself only to the lucky – and this sight truly made me feel blessed.



Shubham Nath is a data analytics professional who likes to explore destinations to tell a meaningful story.



At the summit, the crater of Mount Fuji has a circumference of 4km



The temple of Ta Prohm was used as a location in the 2001 film *Tomb Raider*

ANGKOR WAT, CAMBODIA

Putting down some roots

My trip to Angkor Wat remains one of my most memorable. The world's largest religious monument, it impresses with its sheer size and preserved beauty. This picture was taken at Ta Prohm, which, of all the temples in Angkor, has been largely left to the clutches of the living jungle. I was spellbound to see this huge tree almost completely engulfing the structure, and had to capture it.



Ritabrata Ghosh is an architect-planner who loves travelling around the world.

RAS AL-KHAIMAH, UAE

Kicking up a storm

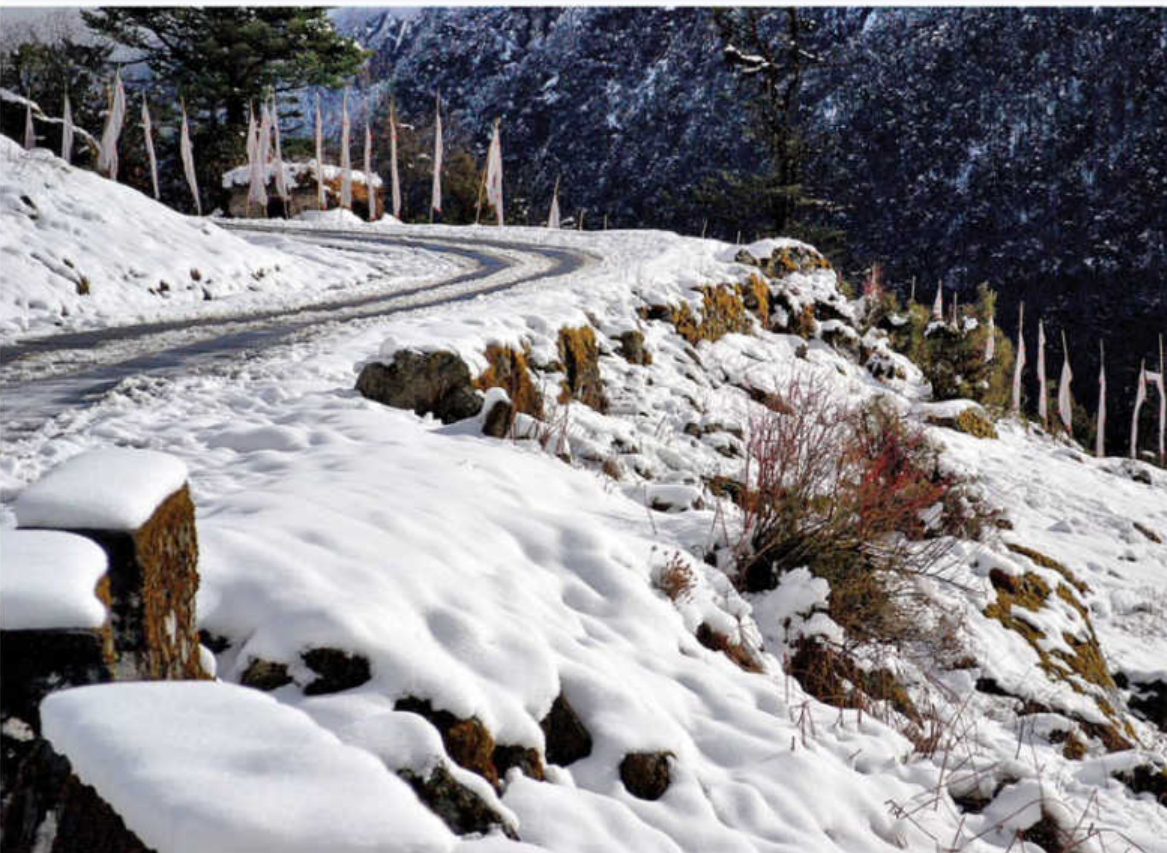
This is one of the magnificent horses in the stables at Banyan Tree Al Wadi, a resort in Ras al-Khaimah. The horses were being trained when this photograph was taken. The setting sun in the backdrop silhouetted the horse perfectly, adding to its magnificence.



Krishna Shah is a professional photographer based in Ahmedabad.



Arabian horses, known for their endurance, are the oldest existing breed of horses in the world



Sikkim became a protectorate of India in 1950, but a state only in 1975

YUMTHANG VALLEY, SIKKIM Snow white

This photo was clicked on the way to Yumthang Valley in Sikkim. We did not reach the valley due to heavy snowfall, but our disappointment turned to joy as soon as we spotted this beautiful landscape, topped with the brightest layer of snow, with colour peeking out in some spots.



Pratibha Patil lives in Pune and works with an IT firm.

MASAI MARA, KENYA

Wild, wild wilderness

A friend and I were in the grasslands of Masai Mara, where we saw these two female ostriches running around wildly. I wonder whether it was a game or a fight to choose the perfect mate. Regardless of the reason, they seemed highly animated, and it was a joy to watch these birds in the wild, as opposed to seeing them on a farm or in a zoo.



Sonia Sahni is a banker who enjoys travelling. She has been to 23 countries so far.



The Masai Mara National Reserve is a must-visit during migration season, through the months of July and August



Over 120 bird species have been recorded in Goa's Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary

PALOLEM, GOA

Hunting high & low

It's amazing to watch the white-bellied sea eagle eye a fish from a distance, and then swoop down into the water to snatch it up. To capture this photograph, I had to pick one among several of these eagles sitting on a hill, waiting patiently. As soon as it spotted its prey, it swooshed down low, hovering over the water, and seamlessly yanked the fish out. So effortlessly done.



Indore-based **Saurabh Kulshreshth** enjoys travel and photography.

NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, THAILAND

Wat a sight!

Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan is a Buddhist temple that is believed to house the Buddha's relics. It's my favourite site, not only because it's in my home town, but because there is so much to see in terms of art and culture. I waited a long time for the perfect night, with the full crimson moon rising behind the palm trees and the golden pagoda in a navy blue sky. I feel that my patience was rewarded with this shot.



Chaibun Damkaew won *Lonely Planet Traveller Thailand's* 2014 photography contest with this image.



According to legend, Prince Thanakuman and Queen Hem Chala brought the Buddha's relics to Nakhon in 291 AD

Celebrating the *Golden Age*

ILLUSTRATION: JAYAKRISHNAN SUBRAMANIAN



of Travel

Great destinations, world-class hotels and a riotous evening – the stars came out to celebrate the best in travel at the fourth annual LPMI Travel Awards



The winners pose with their trophies

It was a night to celebrate the best in travel at the fourth annual Lonely Planet Magazine India Travel Awards, held at the JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar on June 22, 2015.

We believe that there was once a golden age of travel, an age where travel had to be appreciated – each journey was treated as something special, something to anticipate for months. There are some destinations and hotels that, even today, offer this sort of experience, and these are what we celebrated.

We gave out awards, all of which were hand-picked by you, our readers, across 32 categories, on an evening filled with stars and fantastic performances. India's notable comedian Cyrus Sahukar hosted the event,

his witty remarks ensuring that the audience was in splits throughout the evening. Scrumptious cuisines from around the world ensured that spirits never flagged through the fast-paced evening.

The awards were attended by some of the biggest names in the travel industry, as well as celebrities who are keen travellers, like actors Jacqueline Fernandez, Neha Dhupia, Akshay Oberoi, Hiten Tejwani, Gurmeet Choudhary, Avani Modi and designer Pria Kataria Puri.

But the stars of the evening were, of course, our winners. There were both familiar faces from previous years and a host of surprises. The evening was made extra-special with a performance by Silhouette Squad – a celebration of Mumbai through a play of shadows.



1. Deepak Lamba, CEO, Worldwide Media, and Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor, *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, present the award for India's Favourite Destination to Sheema Vohra, MD India, Brand USA

2. Actor Akshay Oberoi presents the award for Best Destination for Wildlife (International) to Hanneli Slabber, Country Head, South African Tourism Board

3. TV star Gurmeet Chaudhary presents the Best Destination for Relaxation (International) award to Pallavi Mannar and Sushant Bhandari, Managers, Maldives Tourism Board, India

4. The stage featured an airplane ready for take-off

5. Actor Jacqueline Fernandez strikes a pose



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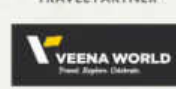
LIFESTYLE PARTNER



WELLNESS PARTNER



TRAVEL PARTNER



AUTOMOBILE PARTNER



LANDMARK PARTNER



VENUE PARTNER



*“Japan, Antarctica & Greece
are on my travel wishlist!”*

- Jacqueline Fernandez



1. Actor Neha Dhupia presents the award for Best Destination for Adventure (Indian) to OP Badoni, PRO, Uttarakhand Tourism

2. Sunila and Neil Patil, Directors, Veena World, present the award for Best Destination for Culture (Indian) to Razit Bhandari, Marketing Head, Punjab Tourism Board, and Basant Raj Kumar, Executive Director, Punjab Tourism Board

3. Jacqueline Fernandez (L) and Neha Dhupia share a light moment

4. Sunil Puri, MD, Mileage Communications India Representative, Hong Kong Tourism Board, accepts the award for Best Destination for Food & Drink (International) from fashion designer Pria Kataria Puri

5. Rakshit Desai, MD, Flight Shop, with a guest

6. Phillippe Charraudeau, VP (W) and GM, ITC Maratha, accepts the award for Best Stay for Business (Indian) on behalf of ITC Maurya, Delhi

7. Actor and funnyman Cyrus Sahukar was the host for the evening

8. Jacqueline Fernandez and Vikki Parris, Head of Retail, Flight Shop, present the Best Emerging Destination (Indian) award to Vinod Kavle, Secretary Tourism, Daman & Diu



GIFT PARTNER



BEVERAGE PARTNER



BEER PARTNER



WINE PARTNER



TROPHY PARTNER



EVENT PARTNER



TRAVEL AWARDS 2015

1. Neha Bhola, Country Manager – India, New Zealand Tourism, accepts the award for Best Destination for Adventure (International) from Neha Dhupia
2. Nayan Seth, GM, Taj Lake Palace Udaipur, receives the award for the Best Stay for Luxury (Indian) from actor Avani Modi
3. Rakshit Desai, MD, Flight Shop, presents the Best Family Destination (International) award to Sheryl Soh, Singapore Tourism Board
4. TV personality Hiten Tejwani at the event
5. Vardhan Kondvikar presents the award for Best Stay for Romance to Ashley Dkhar, GM, Ri Kynjai, Shillong
6. Avani Modi, who is set to feature in Madhur Bhandarkar's *Calendar Girls*
7. Actor, model and dancer Gurmeet Choudhary



"I love beach holidays, and Ibiza is one of my favourite places to head to. In fact, that is where I'm going next!"

– Hiten Tejwani



LIFESTYLE PARTNER



WELLNESS PARTNER





1. Deepak Lamba and Vardhan Kondvikar unveil the July 2015 issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*

2. TV star Hiten Tejwani presents the Best Homestay award to Revathy Iyer & Yogesh Krishnaswami, Founders, Silver Brook Estate, Coorg

3. Tarun Jha, Head of Marketing, Skoda Auto India (L) presents the Best Stay for Business (International) award to Saeid Heidari, GM, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, on behalf of St Pancras Renaissance London Hotel

4. Byungsun Lee, Director, South Korea Tourism, accepts the award for Best Emerging Destination (International) from Jacqueline Fernandez

5. Pria Kataria Puri poses for the cameras

6. Vardhan Kondvikar presents the Best Stay for Relaxation (Indian) award to Rajiv Kaul, President, and NC Somaiah, GM, The Leela Kovalam

7. Akshay Oberoi presents the Best Destination for Wildlife (Indian) to Leena Karkera and Ashok Arora of Madhya Pradesh State Tourism

TRAVEL PARTNER



AUTOMOBILE PARTNER



LANDMARK PARTNER



VENUE PARTNER



GIFT PARTNER



BEVERAGE PARTNER



BEER PARTNER



WINE PARTNER



TROPHY PARTNER



EVENT PARTNER



August 2015



1. The fourth edition of the LPMI Travel Awards celebrated 'The Golden Age of Travel'
2. Li Qianguo, Director, China Tourism (R), accepts the award for Best Destination for Culture (International) from Sunila and Neil Patil
3. Hiten Tejwani presents the award for Best Stay for Wildlife (Indian) to Ratna Malhotra, GM, The Oberoi Vanyavilas, Ranthambore
4. Stephanie Myter, Member of Management and Director of Sales, Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, Switzerland, accepts the Best Stay for Luxury (International) award from Avani Modi
5. Vardhan Kondvikar and Manu Kashyap were part of the jury panel
6. A dapper-looking Akshay Oberoi
7. Renuka Nadkarni, Senior Account Manager, Adfactors PR, accepts the award for Best Value Destination (Indian) on behalf of Goa from Akshay Oberoi
8. Vardhan Kondvikar presents the Best Value Stay award to Nandita Shah, MD, The House of MG, Ahmedabad





"My most memorable trip was to Las Rocas in Venezuela..."
 – Neha Dhupia



1. Vardhan Kondvikar presents the Best Heritage Stay (Indian) award to Vincent Ramos, GM, Taj Umaid Bhawan Palace
2. Vikki Parris and her guest arrive at the LPMI Travel Awards
3. Nat Pinyowattanacheep, Consul General, Tourism Authority of Thailand, accepts the Best Value Destination (International) award from Akshay Oberoi
4. Sunila Patil, Director, Veena World, at the event
5. Silhouette Squad put up a fabulous shadow dance performance
6. Deepak Lamba addresses the audience at the event
7. Neha Dhupia looked radiant in a yellow outfit

LIFESTYLE PARTNER



WELLNESS PARTNER



TRAVEL PARTNER



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MAGAZINE
INDIA

TRAVEL AWARDS

2015

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August 2015



Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



KRABI, THAILAND

Bay watch



Dr Deepti Singh Gupta recommends a beach vacation in Krabi, Thailand

What worked: With an endless coastline along the Andaman Sea in southern Thailand, Krabi is home to hip beaches, pocket-friendly dining, island-hopping and spectacular views of the sea with limestone formations jutting out magnificently. We stayed at the Centara Grand Beach Resort & Villas surrounded by a national park, overlooking a private beach. Kayaking, snorkelling and other watersports activities are available in-house. If you want a break from beach activities, elephant safaris and a trip to the bustling Ao Nang Market are a good idea. Nature lovers will be thrilled here, but stay away from the deceptively charming monkeys.

What didn't: Krabi has nothing new to offer for those who've visited other places like Phuket – it is just quieter and less touristy. Our hotel was a bit secluded, approachable only by the hotel-run boat. The long tail boats, as romantic as they sound, end up hurting your back and wallet alike if you aren't careful; negotiate.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Centara Grand Beach Resorts & Villas: reservations: 00-66-2101-1234; www.centarahotelsresorts.com; Ao Nang, Amphur Muang

UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

Luxury on a lake



Chavi Agarwal from Meerut recommends splurging on a stay at The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur

What worked: The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur, is located on the banks of Lake Pichola overlooking the City Palace and spread over a luxurious 50 acres, including a 20-acre wildlife sanctuary, home to deer and wild boar. The hotel has amazing architecture, lake views, gardens and is one of the best places to go for an exotic vacation. The wonderful hospitality made our first visit to Udaipur very special. The service was truly excellent and the food fantastic. You can have dinner by the lakeside while enjoying Rajasthani folk dances in Chandni Mahal or indulge in a private dinner. A must-do here is the peaceful *shikara* ride around the lake as well as the private yoga session. Don't miss the ayurveda spa either.

What didn't: It's hard to point out what didn't work, but it would be great if there were more Indian sweets on the food menu.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: reservations: 00-91-11-23890606; www.oberoihotels.com, reservations@oberoigroup.com; Haridasji Ki Magri, Udaipur

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW OR SUGGEST

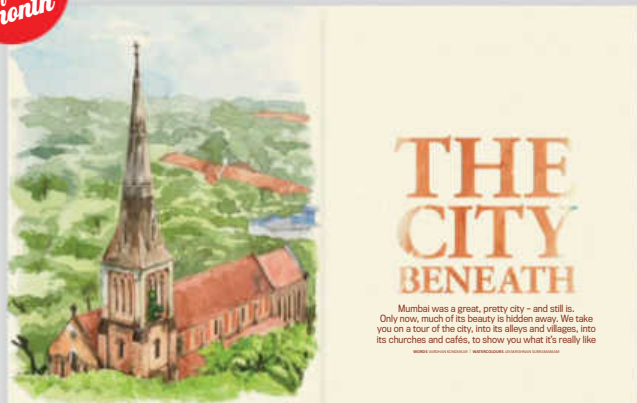
Mail in your reviews and suggestions to lpmagazine@wmm.co.in



Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter
of the
month



Eccentric editor

Do you need to be eccentric to be the editor of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*? It's with great anticipation that I read the Editor's Note each month to see what new bait Vardhan Kondvikar has thrown at us. In one issue, I remember him asking readers to cough up a lakh of rupees,

while, in another, he exhorted us to pack up and go to Goa. In the April 2014 issue, he was lolling in and out of a hammock and pool. It's his grin and his editorial lines that allow him to get away with a lot. There have also been some strokes of genius like the fine piece he did on a European trip and another on Mumbai's hidden architectural treasures ('*The City Beneath*', July 2011). I have kept the magazine that featured the latter but I'm looking for the former. I have tried searching for it to no avail.

For someone who has been a *LPMI* subscriber since inception, can I also make some eccentric requests? I'd like to read stories retracing the steps of the historical greats who walked this land like the Hindu philosopher Adi Shankara's pilgrimage route as well as those of other Chinese and Persian travellers who were awestruck with India at that time. And maybe, while you are at it, please also suggest a place I can retire to with my issues of *LPMI* and books, which my wife threatens to throw out along with me, for usurping valuable living space.

— Eric Pinto, via email

I had read about and seen photos of Goa in this magazine. Recently, on the insistence of a Facebook friend, I happened to be there in spite of my very busy schedule. It turned out to be exactly the same place I had seen in a picture in the magazine. I'd like to congratulate the entire team for the great job that they are doing and for creating an intense desire for travel within us and, at the same time making things possible.

— Aishik Birbanshi, Kolkata



Full of surprises

The July 2015 issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India* was full of surprises. I really loved the photo feature on Papua New Guinea ('*So Far Away*'), but what I loved more

about that feature is that it's shot by a reader.

It's good to see that you appreciate and recognise talent even if it's not a big name.

I also like the concept of telling stories through images, which is why I found *The Photo Story*: Bhutan such a delightful read.

— Pooja Shah, Mumbai

Travel made easy



I had booked the tickets to Amsterdam in March and was wondering how to go through the whole *Lonely Planet Netherlands* guide, when I received the April 2015 edition of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*. It was such a boon! The story in that issue ('*Tiptoe through the Tulips*') inspired me to travel beyond the off-trodden path. Though I didn't cover all the places mentioned in the issue, I explored places like Rotterdam and Kinderdijk in addition to those mentioned in the issue. Thanks to *LPMI*, I could travel through the Netherlands easily. Exploring Amsterdam

was so much simpler with the September 2012 issue as it's a day-wise itinerary ('*City on the Water*').

— Sirsanya Bandopadhyay, Kolkata

A small correction

I would like to draw your attention to the July 2015 issue of *LPMI*, Best Indian Destination – Culture, where, to describe the first runner-up – Karnataka, it's mentioned that Sravanbelgola houses a gigantic Buddha statue. Please note that the monolithic statue in Sravanbelgola is of Gommateshwara Bahubali and belongs to Jainism.

— Kaushik Haldar, via email

Thank you for pointing that out, you're right; the statue is of Gommateshwara Bahubali and not the Buddha. Apologies for the oversight.

Editor

Just do it!

Reading *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is like doing visual meditation. I would like to share a great experience for which the magazine is responsible. Some time ago,

DUST WALLET, TROOPER TRAVEL POUCH, EYE GLASS COVER, STORM CARD HOLDER

Engineered from water-repellent waxed canvas and genuine Oil Pull Up leather trim, the rugged Outback Collection from Viari is an adventure seeker's delight. The vintage Dust Wallet keeps your money safe while the Storm Card Holder protects your cards. The Eye Glass Cover keeps your sunglasses or spectacles away from dust and rain. The well organised Trooper Travel Pouch, on the other hand, fits your toiletries with ease. For more details on the Outback collection, log on to viari.in

The writer of this issue's Letter of the Month wins this Viari Jazz Bag, Manhattan Phone Cover without chain and L Wallet in tan shade.

To write in to the magazine, email us at lpmagazine@wwm.co.in



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A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

PG 45 **Two Sides to... Bruges:** Turn your stopover into a great break

PG 46 **Anything to Declare?** Canadian painter and filmmaker **Cory Trepanier** invites you into the mountains

PG 48 **World on your Plate:** *Choripán*, Argentina's classic sandwich, is a meaty bite, ideal for when you're really hungry!

"When someone sees my paintings from the Arctic, I hope that their own sense of wonder and awe will be ignited..."
– Cory Trepanier in Anything to Declare (pg 46)



I ticked one thing off
my travel wish list
by visiting Machu
Picchu in Peru.
We climbed up
Huayna Picchu
– the peak that you
see in the middle
of this picture





The Photo Story

TOM ROBINSON



Sole mates

A few years ago I'd just met my girlfriend, Verity, and we went to Brighton for the weekend. On that Sunday, we sat on the beach and I had my camera to hand, so I thought that I'd take a picture of our feet and the sea. That summer we travelled to a few other countries, and I realised these photos made for a nice series. Cheesy though it sounds, I had the feeling that I'd be with Verity for a long time. Eight years later, I've taken about 90 of these pictures – now our daughter, Matilda, appears in them too. →

Tom Robinson is a photographer who has travelled extensively through Southeast Asia and South and Central America.

See more of his foot photos at www.tomrobinsonphotography.com.



Valparaiso in Chile is a beautiful city with lots of colourful buildings. This is one of the arrows that you follow on the town's tourist trail



This random dog followed us around for a day near the city of Tilcara in Argentina. His owner later told us he does it all the time



The cable car to Singapore's Sentosa Island. It was one of the first stops on our year of travelling, which took us from Asia to Australia to South America



We travelled Australia's coast in this camper van, often just parking up in a field. We once woke up to a farmer shouting that there was a campsite down the road

Travelling the Mae Kok River in Thailand in 2008. The crazy thing about Southeast Asia is the number of modes of transport that you can get through in one day





This no-frills accommodation in Nicaragua was a room at the back of someone's house. You can see the en-suite shower (and loo) is right next to the TV



You can't imagine how hot it is when you get close to the magma at the Volcán Pacaya, a volcano in Guatemala. The soles of your shoes can melt here



We stopped at a little shack that sold mangoes beside a river near the town of Livingston in Guatemala. We walked to this pier for a quick photo



Glastonbury Festival in 2010 – it was my first music festival. My girlfriend was in the early days of pregnancy, although we didn't know it at the time!

We got very cold posing for this photo in Zell am See in Austria on one of our first trips abroad together in 2005. We tried snowboarding for the first time here →





We stopped off at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport en route to Thailand in 2010. My girlfriend had a bump at the front and a backpack on her back



We spent the night at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport on our way home. They make airport seats uncomfortable to sleep in, so we rigged up a trolley instead



We took a family trip to the Cotswolds – our daughter Matilda was pretty young then, so we put her in a baby carrier and it wasn't hard to carry her up this hill



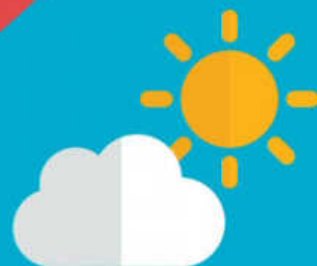
This was taken near Sintra in Portugal, on Matilda's first trip abroad. I saw this kid about to jump and told everyone to get ready for a picture

I took this picture watching the gymnastics at the 2012 Olympic Games. The venue was in what was once the Millennium Dome



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Arrivals

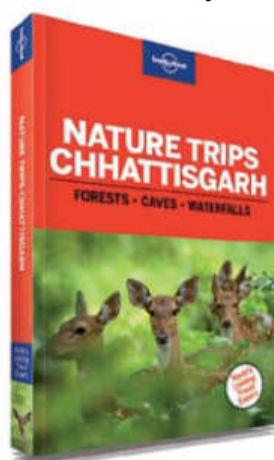
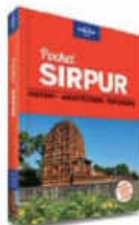
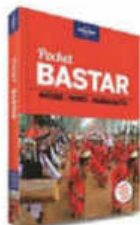
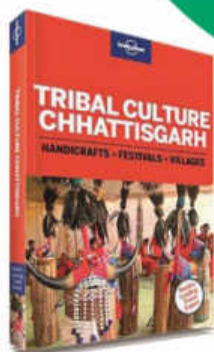
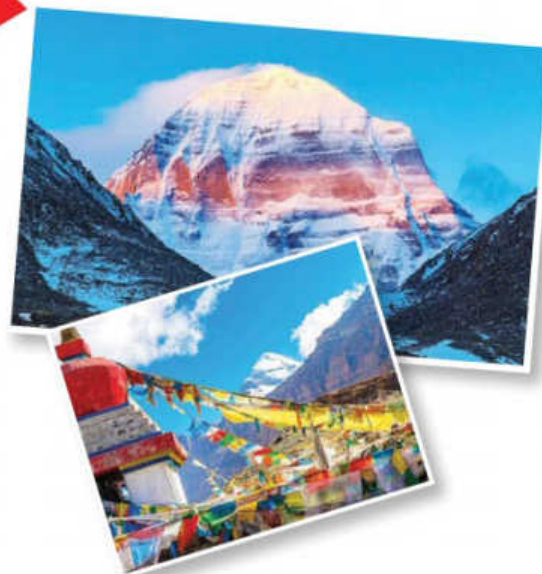


A French toast to heritage

The Champagne Slopes, Houses and Cellars are now on the UNESCO World Heritage list in the Living Cultural Landscapes category. The inclusion celebrates the French region's sites, the work in the vineyards, and the rise of an original method of wine production, making and selling Champagne that has prevailed since the 18th century. Worth popping a few corks for, we think!

China opens new route to Mount Kailash

The arduous trek to MOUNT KAILASH MANSAROVAR just got easier (read: became a cakewalk), with China opening up a new land crossing through Tibet. One of the holiest places for Hindus and Buddhists, pilgrims can now trek to the remote area in less than three days.



New Book

CHHATTISGARH IN YOUR POCKET

Lonely Planet's new **Chhattisgarh Pocket Guide** series is a great way to help you discover the state.

Whether you're looking to explore little-known locations, tribes, local art, temples or wildlife, the guides are designed with Indian travellers' needs in mind, providing information on the highlights of the region, stay options, attractions and shopping opportunities. The full-colour titles –

Nature Trips Chhattisgarh, **Pocket Bastar**, **Pocket Sirpur**, **Temple Trips Chhattisgarh** and **Tribal Culture Chhattisgarh** – are packed with photographs, and priced between ₹ 75 and ₹ 95 (from www.lonelyplanet.in and your local bookstore).



London by Night by Tube

Come September 12, 2015, night owls and other party animals can prowls the streets of London even later than usual. The Underground's NIGHT TUBE will run through the night on certain lines on Friday and Saturday nights.

Airports on TripAdvisor

Airports can be exciting places, or not – depending on how well you've done your research.

TripAdvisor will be soon launching a new **AIRPORT PAGES** feature on its website and app, which will allow you to check its database and use it to find and rate restaurants, boutiques, lounges and the other amenities in each airport. It also allows you to find the latest activities happening around you via its Near Me geo-location.

Now consider transit a bonus extension of your holiday (www.tripadvisor.in).



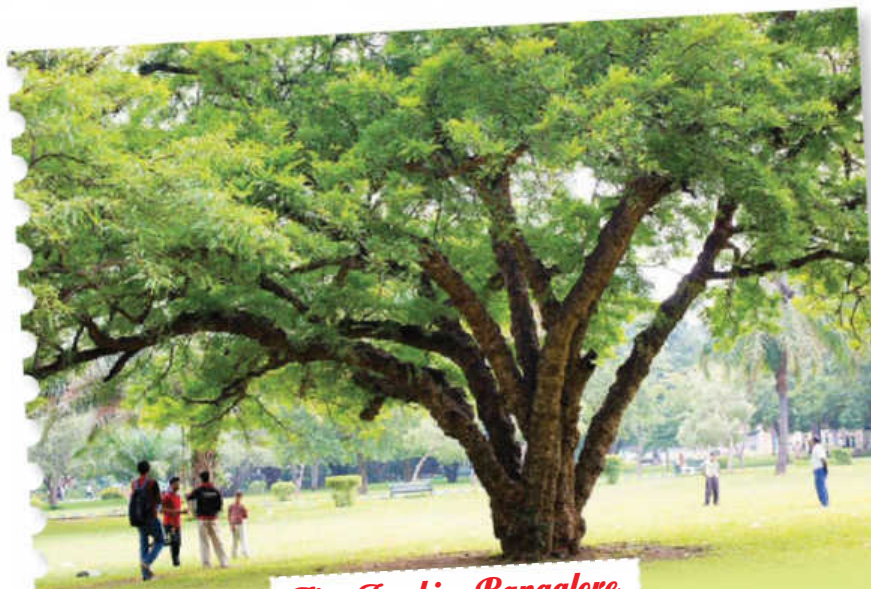
WITH INPUTS FROM HARDIKA PANCHAL, PRIMROSE MONTEIRO-D'SOUZA, ALISHA WADIA, FRIVAN DRIVER & RADHIKA LALLA
PHOTOGRAPHS: SEREZHNYI/123RF (CHAMPAGNE), NATALYA LIKHACHENKO/123RF (MOUNT KAILASH), TOMAS MAREK/123RF (LONDON UNDERGROUND), ROBERT WILSON/123RF (AIRPORT),
JYOTHI KARAT (BANGALORE), CLAIRE RICHARDSON (MAP), SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD (SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS) SOME PHOTOGRAPHS USED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY
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Picnics in Brussels

Here's another reason to stuff your face with waffles and fries in **Brussels**, if ever you need one. Bright red picnic tables are invading the (unofficial) European Union capital this June to September. Called the **EUROPEAN CANTEEN**, this happy experiment is simple: modular picnic tables will pop up across seven

Brussels parks through the summer for 'eating together and sharing public spaces'. In the words of the wise Yogi Bear, let's go get us a pic-a-nic basket! (www.europeancanteen.be)



Five Freebies: Bangalore

- 1 Take a walk through **LALBAGH BOTANICAL GARDEN** (above). Established in 1760, the garden hosts the world's most diverse species, and some of the trees are centuries old.
- 2 Another fave with Bangalore locals, **CUBBON PARK** offers a spectacular view of the Gothic-styled State Central Library and the neo-Dravidian style Vidhana Soudha; it's also the perfect place for a picnic.
- 3 Go back in time at the **BANGALORE FORT**. Built in 1761, all that's remaining of the fort is pink stone walls, the gate and bastions, but it's great to feel history in the making or just for a stroll.
- 4 Even if you've never climbed before, **EQUILIBRIUM**, an indoor climbing station located in the heart of the city, is a perfect rainy-day activity stop as it caters to different levels of ability. Get your hands on the wall with a free eight-minute trial session to see if you want to go the whole climb (www.equilibrium.co.in).
- 5 Bangalore's **FARMERS' MARKET** is the place for those who care about the freshness of the food they eat. The market offers a chance to explore local and organic foods, drinks and pop-up restaurants – and free samples, of course (www.karensfarmersmarkets.in/bengaluru).



TREASURE HUNT THROUGH PARIS

Turn your next trip to the French capital into a scavenger hunt with this new scratch-off map, featuring 30 popular attractions (www.abramsandchronicle.co.uk; from ₹ 950; New York also available).

PARTY TIME IN SINGAPORE!

Our fave city-state is celebrating its 50th birthday, and it's going all out with the pomp and merriment. A calendar of events spanning the rest of the year has been planned – August's line-up includes the Sing50 pop concert on August 7, and the National Day Parade on August 9. And, fortuitously, the gorgeous **Singapore Botanic Gardens** has been added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites! For a complete calendar of events and other updates, check out www.singapore50.sg



Travel News



5 Minutes with Ritchie Plaza

Ritchie is the Chief Concierge at Atlantis The Palm, Dubai

There's never a dull moment at Atlantis, The Palm. The best part about my job is making someone's day and holiday special and, most importantly, unique!

One of my favourite memories as a concierge: A repeat guest's six-year-old daughter had suffered a cancer relapse and her last wish was to swim with the dolphins at Dolphin Bay. The parents were brought to tears when they entered their hotel room on arrival. We had decorated it with pink balloons, a cake, and a welcome banner with their family photos that we got off Facebook. The child passed away three weeks after her holiday, but her parents could not thank us enough for the best holiday she had had.

We've also had some more unusual requests, from organising a private jet for 15 guests to pop over to Saudi Arabia at less than a day's notice, to locating a helicopter to take a couple to dinner at the drop of a hat. One of the requests I love receiving is to organise underwater proposals – such a romantic way to pop the question! More often than not, we set up a private dinner for two in our romantic underwater suite and our team of divers surprises the guest by swimming up to the window with a banner. It's certainly a unique way to ask for a hand in marriage.

Nothing is too much for our guests. Whether they want to buy the last Bugatti model, hire a private super yacht, use one of our onsite Ferraris for the day, or even get hold of VIP One Direction concert tickets, we can make it happen.

What we're hearting

The Department of Forest, Environment and Ecology just designated an area downstream of the **Tungabhadra River** in Karnataka as an **OTTER CONSERVATION RESERVE**, giving the playful critters a safe refuge, the first ever in the country. We think it's otter-ly awesome.



Night Lights at Disney

The happiest place on Earth just got happier with the launch of Disneyland's new **PAINT THE NIGHT PARADE**. The show will leave you gazing in awe as over a million glowing lights take over the night. The parade features spectacular special effects and pulsating music. The 40-minute spectacle is kicked off by Tinker Bell and her 'fibre fairies' after which the rest of the Disney brood takes over (www.disneyland.disney.go.com).

Festivals



Now in its seventh year, **EAT DRINK SF** returns from August 20 to 23, 2015 as **San Francisco's** premier annual food, wine and spirits festival. That's four days of fantastic food! Pique your taste buds with dishes from over 30 top restaurants and more than 70 different wines, beers and cocktails poured by sommeliers, brewers and top mixologists. Also on the menu are cooking demos, classes taught by renowned tastemakers, and a chance to mingle with the tastemakers that make the Bay Area a top dining destination (www.sanfrancisco.travel).



Enjoy the excitement of **REITAISAI**, a festival celebrating *Yabusame*, a Shinto ritual of shooting arrows on horseback. Held from September 14 to 16, 2015, at the 800-year-old Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura City in **Japan's** Kanagawa Prefecture, it consists of a tea-offering ceremony to the gods, Japanese dance, and, of course, the *Yabusame* contest combining equestrian skills and Japanese-style archery, which was popular among the samurai warriors from the end of the Heian Period (794-1192) to the Kamakura Period (1192-1333) (www.jnto.go.jp/eng).



Malaysia's biggest shopping extravaganza is back! Until August 31, 2015, the annual **1MALAYSIA MEGA SALE CARNIVAL** and **1MALAYSIA UNIFIED SALE** offer bargains, discounts and fun-filled promos at malls and retail stalls throughout the country. There's also the **#beautifulMalaysia Online Contest**, with weekly prizes to be won until September 29, open to participants from all over the world who submit photos capturing the country's beauty in four categories – places, festivals, food and shopping (www.tourism.gov.my/beautifulMalaysia).

PHOTOGRAPHS: LUTROGALE-PERSPICILLATA/123RF (OTTERS), KANYARAT MUANGKHIAO/123RF (DISNEY), 123RF LIMITED/123RF (MALAYSIA)



Travel News

Packages

The **AVARI HOTEL DUBAI** presents its three-day **Monsoon Stay** package for about ₹ 13,810, which includes stay, welcome drinks on arrival, breakfast, free Internet service, airport transfers, as well as a complimentary shuttle service to the major shopping centres (www.avari.com; valid till Sept 30, 2015).



The five-star **RESORT RIO, Goa**, offers a Monsoon Getaway package to keep you in high spirits. For ₹ 9,000/ night on double occupancy, you get accommodation in a Luxury Deluxe Room for three nights, breakfast, lunch and dinner, 20 per cent discount at the spa, two-way shared airport or railway station transfers, free entry to the Bar Terrazzo Discotheque and unlimited domestic house brand liquor from 10.30pm to 11.30pm, activities for kids at 'Hoya Kids Club', wi-fi access in all public areas and a complimentary shuttle service to Baga Beach. Make it a really happy holiday by upgrading: pay an additional ₹ 4,500 all-inclusive for two people for three nights and enjoy unlimited premium liquor at the resort from 11am to 11pm. Cheers! (www.resortrio.com; valid till Aug 31, 2015)



Tea and *pakodas* is a rainy-day cliché we love. You can indulge in it at **THE RESORT MADH-MARVE**, a quick drive from **Mumbai**, with its monsoon package starting from ₹ 6,969 per night on a twin-sharing basis. It entitles you to a stay in a Deluxe Room, a welcome drink, breakfast and dinner, a 15 per cent discount on food and non-alcoholic beverages, and *pakodas* or spring rolls with tea on the day of arrival (www.theresortmumbai.com; valid till Sept 30, 2015).



Art nerds, book your hotel and exhibition tickets in one go! The **Philadelphia Museum of Art** is offering its **DISCOVERING THE IMPRESSIONISTS: PAUL DURAND-RUEL AND THE NEW PAINTING** package that includes a night's stay (choose from 15 area hotels), two admission tickets and a complimentary dessert at a Chef's Table meal at Granite Hill to sweeten the deal. Now that's what we call getting your Monet's worth (www.philamuseum.org; till Sept 13, 2015).



WOMEN'S
SPECIAL

MANA HOTELS in Ranakpur,

Rajasthan, offers a special package only for women. The two-night, three-day package for two with one child under five years costs ₹ 32,000 till September 30, and ₹ 35,000 from October 1, 2015 to March 2016. It includes stay in a Deluxe Room, meals, a visit to Ranakpur Temple, Camel Charisma and Durrie Udhyog (carpet making), a cooking class and other activities (www.manahotels.in).



TO SRI LANKA, TO SRI LANKA... FROM KOLKATA

You can now fly from **Kolkata** to **Colombo** seamlessly – thanks to a codeshare agreement between **SRILANKAN AIRLINES**, the national carrier of Sri Lanka, and **MIHIN LANKA**. Flights will be thrice weekly from Kolkata – on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (www.srilankan.com).

New! New! New!



ST REGIS IN THE MALDIVES

Being stranded on an island takes on a whole new meaning, as the iconic St Regis brand introduces its newest hotel in the Maldives, scheduled to open in 2016. Just a 40-minute seaplane ride from the capital Male, the **ST REGIS VOMMULI RESORT** is located on a private atoll, completely untouched and surrounded by the turquoise lagoon. With 77 thoughtfully-designed villas, six spa rooms and an infinity pool, the resort is sure to pamper you. It also offers you the opportunity to explore marine life through its very own dive and activity centre, and boasts an all-day dining restaurant, three specialty restaurants and a signature bar (www.stregis.com).

JAPANESE AT THE MET

Celebrate Japan's Kanto Matsuri (Lantern Festival) with a special menu at **SAKURA** at The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa in New Delhi.

Served with a glass of beer, the menu includes *Chenmi Santanmori* (three kinds of fish), *edamame* (soyabean pods), *gyoza* (pan-fried dumplings), rolled sushi, fried squid and sliced pork ramen.

On till August 31, 2015, the menu is priced at ₹ 1,500 + taxes (www.hotelmetdelhi.com).



Travel Icon

Eiffel Tower

A TRIOMPHE OF ENGINEERING

First described by contemporary critics as 'monstrous', 'useless', 'ridiculous' and a 'hateful column of bolted sheet metal', the Eiffel Tower has since found a place in Parisian hearts, and has so far lasted 106 years beyond its scheduled dismantling date. Built for the 1889 World's Fair, the tower was originally a monumental gateway like its Parisian comrade, the Arc de Triomphe, and a showpiece for new revolutionary iron-lattice architecture. It was an instant hit, and remains by some measures the world's most visited paid-for tourist attraction – over 250 million have ascended its giddy heights since opening, or four times the population of France today.

HIGH HOPES

Like the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Empire State Building and the Burj Khalifa, the Eiffel Tower once claimed the distinction of being the world's tallest structure – only to be overtaken by the Chrysler Building in 1930. However, in 1957, it passed its old adversary in New York after radio masts were added; it is now 324m high.

TRI-COLOUR

Believe it or not, the Eiffel Tower is painted in three different shades of brown, with the darkest shade on the top and the lightest on the bottom. The shading is meant to counteract atmospheric haze, and make the structure appear one uniform colour from top to bottom. In previous lives, the tower was once painted bright red and once yellow.

TOWER OF DANGER

The Eiffel Tower's first floor has long been a magnet for reckless daredevils. In 1912, Franz Reichelt jumped to his death from the platform while attempting to demonstrate a wearable parachute, while, in 1926, Léon Collot tried to fly his plane beneath the first floor arch and crashed.

COPYCATS

The Eiffel Tower has spawned many replicas, but the earliest building to take inspiration from the structure was the Blackpool Tower. It was built five years after its French cousin, after the town's mayor demanded something similarly grand beside the Lancashire seaside.

HEART OF GLASS

The tower recently emerged from a major refit to mark its 125th anniversary, the most impressive feature of which is a new glass platform on the first floor. Now visitors can tiptoe nervously while looking at the giant queues far below.

Two sides to...

Bruges, Belgium

Inside

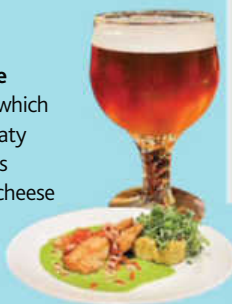


SEE

Step from a chaotic pier into a languid bathhouse at **Historium** (above), where Van Eyck's paintings spring to life in a walkthrough story featuring young lovers amid the sights, sounds and even smells of the past. The medieval fantasy tour ends at a panoramic terrace with a great view of Markt Square (www.historium.be/en/home; Markt 1; 10am–6pm; ₹ 875).

EAT

Drop into **Bierbrasserie Cambrinus**, which serves up meaty Flemish stews and Trappist cheese croquettes. Half the dishes on the menu are flavoured with beer, which isn't surprising given the 400 varieties of the drink on offer here (00-32-50-332-328; www.cambrinus.eu/english.htm; Philipstockstraat 19; 11am–11pm; mains from ₹ 1,125).



SLEEP



Die Swaene (above) is an ancient trading house with antique furniture and pretty painted walls. It had boats coming up to its doorstep back in the day; the pier's gone now but the stories remain (00-32-50-342-798; www.dieswaene.be, info@dieswaene.com; Steenhoudersdijk 1; from ₹ 13,000).

SHOP

Spegelaere Chocolaterie is a family-run chocolate shop loved by the locals and often overlooked by visitors. Bring home some truffles and pralines, which have the smooth texture of Belgian confectionery, and the signature chocolate-dipped marzipan grapes (00-32-50-336-052; Ezelstraat 94; from ₹ 150).

Outside



SEE

Bruges drips with romance and history. Stroll past its canals and make way for horse-drawn carriages in the medieval Burg and Markt squares where you can gaze up at the towering **Belfry** and **Church of Our Lady**. Follow the cobblestones from these lively squares to the quiet, swan-filled Lake of Love (www.bezoekers.brugge.be).

EAT

Grab a quick snack at **'T Zand Square** where street stalls

sell crispy hot *friet* (potato fries) and syrup-smothered, whipped cream-laden waffles near a large fountain adorned with motley sculptures. A small fun fair with carousels and bumper cars adds to the relaxed vibe (on the corner of 'T Zand, Zandstraat; fries and waffles from ₹ 250).



SHOP



Trendy Steenstraat (left) is home to popular stores and brands like Zara and H&M. Also check out the lace-framed shop windows dotting the town. The delicate handmade lace of Bruges comes in all sizes from small scented sachets to large tablecloths (*lace souvenirs* from ₹ 350).

SLEEP

For a unique stay, head to **Hotel de Barge**, a large wooden boat converted into a comfy floating hotel. It has a canal-facing lounge and bar, plus cute details like life jackets laid out on the beds (00-32-50-385-150; www.hoteldebarge.be, info@hoteldebarge.be; Bargeweg 15; from ₹ 9,075).

Anything to Declare?

I want to reignite wonder and awe

GOING BACK TO NATURE CAN BRING PEACE, SAYS CORY TREPANIER

The Canadian North has always fascinated me. It offers me a completely different landscape to paint, with a palette of colours different from any I'd used before. Then, there are the incredible shapes of the mountains, and the challenge of trying to capture on canvas scenes of such a grand scale that they are hard to comprehend. And, of course, there is that sheer joy of exploring new wild places, of leaving civilisation behind.

After three expeditions into the Arctic, I appreciate the north through encounters beyond the act of painting – travelling with the Inuit, close brushes with wildlife and challenging weather, and just being out there, where I feel so tiny and humbled in such a vast and overpowering landscape. And, as a painter who also works in the studio, I am fortunate to be able to relive these experiences with every paint stroke.

From painter to filmmaker was a natural evolution really. As I began to do longer painting trips, I started to document my experiences to share as videos alongside. People seemed to really connect with these short videos. On my first big project, *Coast to Canvas*, my wife Janet and I decided to



Canadian painter and filmmaker Cory Trepanier's latest adventure was a month-long journey into Kluane National Park & Reserve to capture the untamed beauty of the wild Yukon on canvas (truewild.ca/trepanieroriginals.com).

capture our story as it unfolded to make our first film to accompany an exhibition of the paintings. People liked it so much that we made DVDs and sold a lot of them. I worked up the nerve to send it to some TV broadcasters, and an arts network bought it. That encouraged me to pursue filmmaking seriously. On long trips, I cannot be painting every minute; I might as well make films.

My family sometimes joins me on my expeditions.

This began early, when our daughters were two-and-a-half and five years old on the *Coast to Canvas* project. There's certainly a lot more stuff to pack when travelling as a family, and it's a lot more difficult to move four people around the wilderness than just two. But the biggest difference is the responsibility for the kids' safety and wellbeing, which takes away from the time I have to explore and paint. But I've never regretted giving up this time, because it is so rewarding to have them with us. Bringing my girls into the wilderness is one of the greatest gifts I've ever been able to give them. It has given them a greater appreciation for the world around them, made them more independent young ladies, and taught them how to deal with unexpected challenges. That said, sometimes, the risks are too

Cory at the edge of Dusty Glacier in Kluane and (right, bottom) the glacier captured in a painting in the *TrueWild: Kluane* series



great, which is why the family did not come with me to Baffin and Ellesmere Islands; dealing with polar bears, crossing glacial rivers and carrying huge packs are not family-friendly activities. Hopefully, when they're older, they'll take me out.

Travelling without the kids is like being a kid again.

I get to set down the responsibility of fatherhood for a while, and worry only about myself and my (adult) companion. But I really miss the girls (now 16 and 20) as a trip wears on.

My most recent adventure in Kluane was a world of travel firsts for me. It was the first time I was truly "in the mountains," camping, back-country skiing and painting. Other firsts: first time horseback riding in the Yukon wilderness, rafting down a wild river, seeing an iceberg collapse before my eyes, watching a glacier glowing by the light of the magical northern lights at three in the morning. And, of course, first time digging a latrine in snow 13 feet deep.

John Muir, referred to as the father of national parks in the USA, once said: "**When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.**"

Time in nature allows us to exercise our sense of discovery and rejuvenate our minds, away from the crazy pace that so many lead in the cities. There is also to be found a greater sense of connection with the Creator, spending time in places that we haven't yet messed up with pollution and destruction.

When someone sees my paintings, **I hope that their own sense of wonder and awe will be ignited.** I hope that this collection of paintings from truly wild places will reconnect some with the idea of turning off the television or YouTube for a while, and stepping out into nature themselves more often – whether it be in Canada, in India or anywhere else.



World on your Plate

Choripán

Argentina



EAT LOCAL!

In Argentina, *choripán* is best eaten at a family *asado* (barbecue), or from a *puesto de choripán* (food cart), and washed down with cola or icy beer

THIS classic sandwich is what fuels Argentinian football and family barbecues. The *choripán* probably began with the *gauchos* (Argentinian cowboys) grilling meat over an open fire, and socking it into bread to eat on the vast grasslands. Much of its success lies in gathering the best *chorizo* and baguettes possible.

- * 1 baguette, cut into six parts, sliced horizontally without cutting each piece through
- * 6 small *chorizos*

For the *chimichurri*

- * 1 bunch parsley, chopped
- * Minced garlic
- * 1/3 cup olive oil
- * 1 small tomato, chopped
- * 1 tbsp red onion, chopped (optional)

- * 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- * Crushed red pepper flakes
- * Juice of ½ lime
- * Salt and pepper to taste

1. Grill the *chorizos* over medium high heat till cooked through and crisped around the edges. Slice each one lengthwise.

2. To prepare the *chimichurri*, combine the parsley, garlic, olive oil, tomato, red onion, red wine vinegar, crushed

red pepper flakes and lime juice in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper, and adjust lime juice, olive oil and red pepper flakes as needed. Mix well – it should be slightly chunky.

3. Place the two halves of each grilled *chorizo* on one slab of baguette. Spoon the *chimichurri* over, then press the roll closed.

4. Serve immediately.

Easy Trips

you can do now



1



2



3



4



5

inside

1. **PUDUCHERRY**
Get a taste of an unusual but delicious mix of French and Tamil cuisine
2. **AHILYA FORT, Madhya Pradesh**
Peek into the history of Maheshwar's beloved queen and live in her palace
3. **THEKKADY, Kerala**
Bursting with plantations and cool stays, Thekkady's an ideal weekend break
4. **THIMPHU, Bhutan**
The happy kingdom's capital offers a great selection of experiences for every kind of visitor
5. **KAMSHET, Maharashtra**
Watch the rain come down from the cosy confines of your room at Le Farm



Food trail through Puducherry

BON APPETIT

When fresh baguettes are on the breakfast menu, it's easy to forget you're in South India. In Puducherry, a former French colony, however, they are *de rigueur*: required by etiquette. Often called the riviera of the East, Puducherry is just three hours from Chennai and a fascinating mélange of French and Tamil culture. The city's foodscape is just as unique, with meals that are ingredient focused and heavily influenced by both its past and current inhabitants, many of whom are artisanal food producers.

Begin your eating frenzy before you even hit Pondy by making a short detour to **Tanto** (near Puducherry Airport;

see *Where to Eat* for all details). It grows its own vegetables, makes its own pasta and all the recipes come from the Italian proprietor Daniel Emdin's mother. Not surprisingly, everything tastes as good as when mamma makes it. It's best known for its delicious, thin crust wood-fired pizza (₹ 280 for a small Spicy), but the seafood risotto (₹ 350) is also pretty good.

Once in the city, park yourself at **New Banana Café**, a rooftop café with a relaxed, boho vibe. Order a *galette*, a savoury crêpe made from buckwheat, stuffed with tomatoes, cheese and olives (₹ 160), and wash it down with

Above: Pick up fine French pastries and macarons to go at Baker Street
Below: Kitschy wares for sale at Nirvana store at Café Des Arts

refreshing mint hibiscus lemonade (₹ 80).

It's a good thing that this coastal enclave is made for walking – stop by at the local chocolaterie and you'll know why.

At **Zuka**, the *pakor*s (₹ 35) are made of nuts covered in chocolate, and the hot chocolate (₹ 110) arrives with a spoon made of chocolate and two cubes of, yes, grated chocolate, to be mixed into an already luscious-looking beverage.

Much like the city itself, Puducherry's food marries fine French cuisine with distinct local flavours. Check how well it does at **Carte Blanche**, tucked inside the lovely Hotel de l'Orient. The weekly-changing menu is largely continental; try the white chicken curry (₹ 550).





GREAT FROM
Bangalore, Chennai

GREAT FOR
Foodies and Francophiles

GO NOW
To escape the rain.

Skip your hotel breakfast for a lazy *petit déjeuner* at **Café Des Arts**, a whimsical café in a converted Franco-Tamil house with a gallery, a library and a cycle rickshaw in the garden. It does the delightfully-named *croque monsieur*, a ham and cheese grilled

sandwich, well (₹210). Get the *croque madame* if you'd like it with egg (₹230).

Evenings are best spent on the promenade. Stroll down to **Le Café**, famous for its organic South Indian coffee – order it cold (from ₹60) – and if you can't snag a picnic table, head upstairs for the best sunset views and people-watching. It stays open late so it's just the place to sate midnight cravings and listen to the crashing waves.

Stave off any homesickness with a meal at **Hotel Sri Kamatchi**, an unpretentious joint with fabulous Tamil food. Mop up the *vanjaram* curry with fluffy *kal dosai* (₹150 for the combo), or try the fish Kamatchi (₹150) and unusual chicken

1. The French Quarter is leafy, quaint and perfect for strolling
2. Wood-fired pizza fresh out of the oven at Tanto
3. Try the home made hibiscus lemonade at New Banana Café
4. The Tamil spread at Hotel Sri Kamatchi is legendary
5. Café Des Arts is quirky inside and out

uttapam (₹140). The veg offerings are yummy, and the *podu* and chutneys good enough to make a meal of.

Extend your holiday a little longer by stopping for a leisurely meal at Serenity Beach. **Theevu Plage** is a little slice of paradise, with chic decor and splendid views out to sea. Cool off with the *gazpacho* (₹210), move on to the catch of the day off the grill (from ₹470), and end with a delicious scoop (₹100) from Auroville's gelato man Francesco, who makes everything from scratch, using only natural ingredients.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR

PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO

CLICK TO
VIEW ON
GOOGLE
MAPS**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE****Closest metro:** Chennai (170km)**Closest airport:** Puducherry has an airport, but only services direct flights from Bangalore on Air India (return fares from ₹ 7,200). **Chennai International Airport** (150km) is well connected to most Indian metros (return fares from ₹ 2,200).**Closest railhead:** Puducherry Railway Station (PDY). The daily **16115 Puducherry Express** is a good option from Chennai (leaves Chennai Egmore [MS] 6.10pm, arrives PDY 10.30pm; ₹ 335 AC Chair Car), while the **16116 Chennai Express**

will bring you back to Chennai (leaves PDY 5.35am, arrives MS 9.30am; ₹ 335 AC Chair Car).

GETTING AROUNDYou don't need your own transport in Puducherry, and it's easy enough to get around the French Quarter on foot. Autorickshaws are readily available, but don't go by the meter. Agree on a fair price beforehand. We drove from Chennai using the services of **Travel Cart** (00-91-9447169933; www.travelcartindia.com; from ₹ 2,900/ day for an AC sedan).**WHERE TO STAY****Hotel de l'Orient:** A beautifully-restored property, Hotel de l'Orient offers 14 uniquely-styled rooms and two suites in an 18th-century mansion. The hallways are filled with art and antiques, and the service is warm and hospitable (00-91-413-2343067; www.hotel-de-lorient.neemranahotels.com; l.orient@neemranahotels.com; 17, Rue Romain Rolland; from ₹ 3,500 with breakfast and wi-fi).**Gratitude Heritage:** A tranquil heritage property with nine charming rooms, a leafy courtyard and a no-children policy, this hotel offers board games and books in lieu of television. The staff is welcoming and the breakfast generous (00-91-413-22205029; www.gratitudeheritage.in, gratitudeheritage@yahoo.in; 52, Rue Romain Rolland; ₹ 4,000 with breakfast and wi-fi).**Villa Shanti:** A revamped heritage building with contemporary flair, Villa Shanti offers 15 luxurious rooms and suites peppered with local motifs. It also houses a popular courtyard restaurant that is open to non-resident guests (00-91-413-4200028; www.lavillashanti.com, hotel@lavillashanti.com; 14, Suffren St; from ₹ 7,000 with breakfast, free bike hire and wi-fi).**WHERE TO EAT****Tanto:** 00-91-413-2622368; Auroville Main Rd (closed Tues) and 21, ECR Rd; 12.30pm – 3pm, 6.30pm – 9.30pm
New Banana Café: 00-91-9626561259; www.newbananacafe.wordpress.com; 42, Cazy St; 9am – 10pm, closed Mon

Below: Graffiti can be spotted in the unlikely places

**Zuka:** 00-91-413-2221191;

319, Mission St; 9am – 10pm

Carte Blanche: 00-91-413-2343067;

Hotel de l'Orient, 17, Rue Romain Rolland; 12pm – 3pm, 7pm – 9.30pm

Café Des Arts: 00-91-9994481914;www.cafedesartspudicherry.com;

10, Suffren St; 8.30am – 7pm,

closed Tues

Le Café: 00-91-413-2334949; Beach Rd, near Gandhi Statue; open 24X7**Hotel Sri Kamatchi:** 00-91-413-

2224336; 5, Labourdonnais St;

12pm – 4.30pm, 6.30pm – 10pm

Theevu Plage: 00-91-9600777038;

Serenity Beach, Kottakuppam;

10am – 10pm

**SHOPPING**Make room in your luggage for **Baker Street's** traditional treats. The staff at this fine French patisserie isn't the friendliest, but the beautiful pastries and flaky croissants are so good, you won't care (00-91-413-6458888; www.baker-street.co.in; 123, Bussy St; 7am – 9pm; croissants: ₹ 55). Auroville, nearby, is home to many food businesses and **Boutique St Laurent** is the best place in the city to find them all. Choose from La Ferme cheeses, bean-to-bar chocolate, cold drinks, and biscuits from the Auroville bakery (00-91-413-2342220; 10, Rue Du Bazar St Laurent; bottled beverage: from ₹ 50).**WHAT TO PACK**

Comfortable footwear, sunscreen, antacids and clothing that runs one size large

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

The rest stops at Mahabalipuram are decent on the way from Chennai. In Puducherry, the restaurants have good toilets and handwash facilities.

SAFETY

Puducherry feels very safe but, as with anywhere else, watch your belongings and stick to well-lit paths.

**MEDICAL AID**The services at **New Medical Centre** come recommended (00-91-413-2222733; www.nmcpondy.com; 159, Bussy St).**CHILD-FRIENDLINESS**

Puducherry is well suited for families, but a food trail is best avoided by fussy eaters.

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Ahilya Fort, Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh

LIVING LIKE ROYALTY

"What's that sound?" you think to yourself as you hear the chanting upon entering Ahilya Fort. As you step out onto the balcony of your room, it grows clearer. It's one of the gardeners intoning, "*Ram Sita Ram...Ram Sita Ram...*", a chant that continues to be in the background during your stay at this beautiful heritage resort.

You quickly learn that spirituality runs deep in the veins of Maheshwar's residents, just like it did in the veins of their beloved queen, Ahilya Bai Holkar, who ruled Indore in the 18th century from the palace that's now a hotel.

On arrival, you're greeted by Kunta Bai, whose worn-out sari and unassuming

appearance belie her towering personality. Appointed caretaker (and resident superwoman) when the owner, Richard Holkar, is away in France, she is much like a mother dragon with her baby, fiercely protective and proud. The fort itself is part public garden and part hotel, the latter part walled away from the eyes of curious tourists. Inside, it's a different world: one where silence is indeed golden, with only the chirping of birds and, of course, the chants in the air. Sepia-toned photographs of the royal family adorn the whitewashed walls around the courtyard, while rain-soaked trees and flowers infuse the

Above: A thriving organic garden surrounds the pool at Ahilya Fort

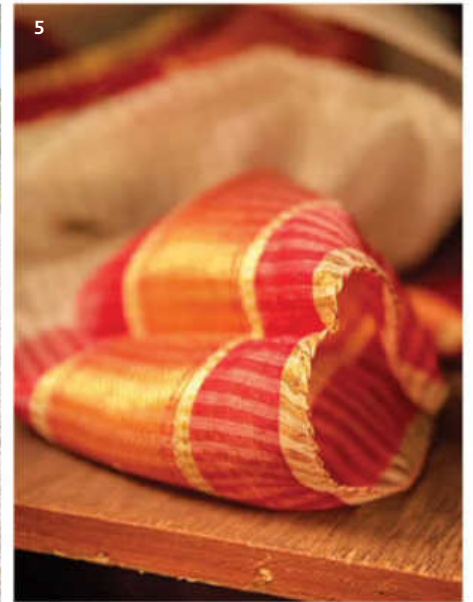
Below: Jams and marmalades made by Richard Holkar are served at breakfast

space outside with life and colour. There's no room service or TV, so you have all the time you need to explore the hidden nooks.

Meals here are always a surprise – you could have breakfast by the pool, lunch in a shaded courtyard, and dine by night along the fort's rampart, overlooking the Narmada River. Featuring dishes from the royal kitchens, the daily-changing menu uses fresh produce from the resort's organic garden.

On a pleasant day, step down to the ghats flanking the river – the sight is a mirror image of Varanasi, minus the crowds. Gape at Ahilya Bai Holkar's cenotaph here, a plain monument





GREAT FROM

New Delhi, Mumbai, Indore

GREAT FOR

A quiet, romantic weekend

GO NOW

While it's cool and green.

surrounded by beautiful structures commissioned much after her death by her daughter-in-law. This is also where you can take a boat ride to [Baneshwar Temple](#) on a tiny island in the Narmada River (organised by the hotel; free). Lore has it that this temple lies on the axis

connecting the centre of the Earth to the pole star. The hotel also offers boat rides with a twist – *and* champagne. You dine in the midst of hundreds of *diyas*, set afloat prior to your arrival, with your loved one (₹ 13,000/ person, book in advance). How's that for a great splurge for romance?

There's plenty to do if you're rained in too. Loll in the library, which stocks everything from pulp fiction to tomes on the royal dynasties of India. Rainy days are also perfect for some pampering at the spa (₹ 1,000/ person/ 60 minutes).

To know more about the history of this place, seek out Basant Maheshwarkar, a crumpled old man who says he is "only 62 years old." He'll tell you how the fort

1. Steps lead down to the *ghats* from Ahilyeshwar Temple, adjoining the fort

2. The hotel's library, with its eccentric decor, has a great collection of books

3. The daughter of a weaver employed at Rehwa Society

4. Baneshwar Temple sits pretty in the middle of Narmada River

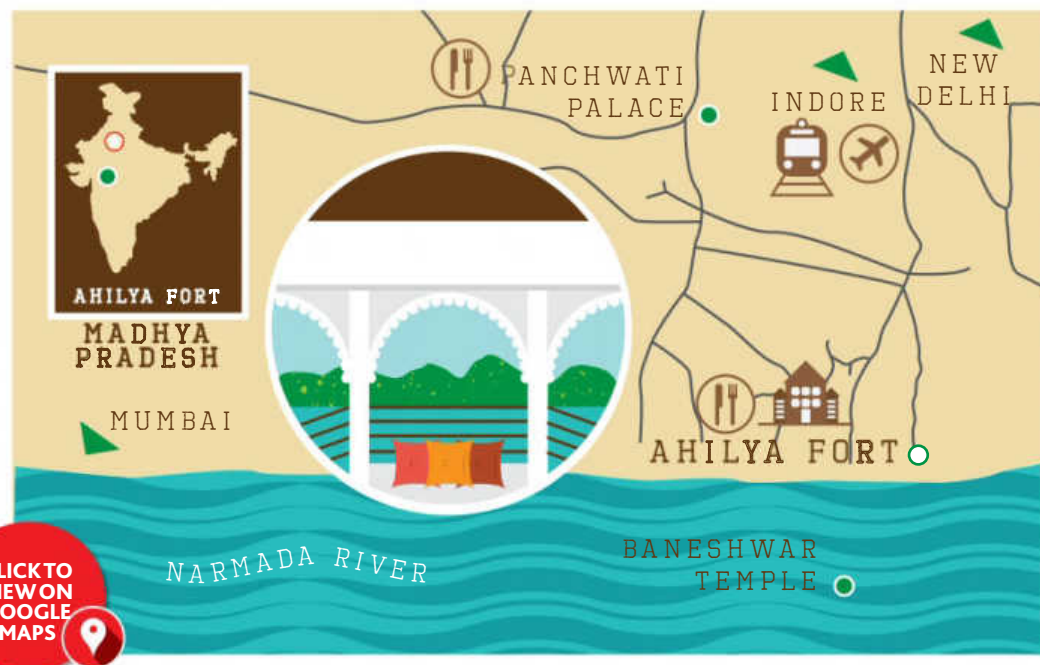
5. The designs on Maheshwari saris are inspired by the fort's architecture

was captured by the Holkars, and about the death of Ahilya Bai's husband, after which she was asked to assume the throne instead of committing *sati*. "Ahilya Bai was the best ruler we had," he says reverentially as he shows you around [Maheshwar Palace](#), her living quarters now transformed into a small museum that's open to public (7am – 7pm).

The queen's legacy lives on in Maheshwar and her people, and there's no better way to experience it than by living in the heart of Ahilya Fort, where it all began.

WORDS SHRADDHA UCHIL

PHOTOGRAPHS SUPRIYA KANTAK

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Mumbai (514km)

Closest city: Indore (96km)

Closest airport: Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport, Indore (98km). Jet Airways, Indigo and Air India fly to Indore from New Delhi (from ₹ 2,900 return).

Closest railhead: Although Barwaha (50km) is the closest railway station to Maheshwar, Indore Junction (INDB; 98km) offers better connectivity. Take the 12416 Intercity Express (leaves Hazrat

Nizamuddin Railway Station [NZM] 10.15pm, arrives INDB 12pm; ₹ 1,150 Third AC) and return by the 12415 Nizamuddin Express (leaves INDB 4pm, arrives NZM 5.40am; ₹ 1,270 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

You will need a car to travel from Indore airport to Ahilya Fort and back. We used and liked the services of Rai Travels, based in Bhopal (00-91-9893054246; www.raitravels.com, gopal@raitravels.com; ₹ 2,850/ day/ AC Indica).

**WHERE TO STAY**

Ahilya Fort: There are 14 rooms here, including the Royal Maharajah Tent, which is currently under renovation. No two rooms look the same, and they are all scattered across different buildings in the property, ensuring privacy. All the rooms are quaint, largely furnished using the Holkar's 19th-century relics, but come with mod cons. If you're looking for a romantic break, snap up the Narmada Suite, which overlooks the river and comes complete with a sitting area and a bathtub snack dab in the middle of the room (reservations: 00-91-11-41551575; www.ahilyafort.com, info@ahilyafort.com; Ahilya Wada, Maheshwar, West Nimar; from ₹ 14,000/ night with all meals and sunset boat ride).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Apart from the meals, you can also snack on *samosas*, sandwiches, omelettes and *parathas* at the in-house **Laboos Café**. Stop here for a light snack before

heading out (see *Where to Stay*; 7am – 10pm; aloo paratha: ₹ 35, omelette: ₹ 40, tea: ₹ 15). A short walk away from Ahilya Fort is **Panchwati Palace**. Head here for some great veg fare. The restaurant serves a variety of cuisines, including Punjabi, Gujarati and South Indian, and the service is quick and efficient. Try the *palak paneer* with piping hot *rotis* (00-91-7283-273274; www.panchwatipalace.co; Pandhrinath Marg, Panchwati Colony; lunch: 8am – 5pm, dinner: 7pm – 11pm; mains from ₹ 75).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Light, breathable clothing, rain gear, comfortable walking shoes that can be easily slipped on and off (for temple visits) and swimwear

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

The loos en route to Maheshwar from Indore are less than satisfactory, so it's best to use the airport loo, or wait till you arrive at the hotel.

**SHOPPING**

Richard and his wife Sally Holkar established the **Rehwa Society** in 1979 to revive the dying tradition of weaving in Maheshwar and to provide housing, healthcare and education to the weavers' families. The incredibly light Maheshwari saris are made using yarns like silk, cotton, linen, wool and tussar, and come in jewel tones and rich colours with gold-thread *zari* borders. The weavers draw inspiration from the fort and its architecture – instead of floral motifs, you'll find patterns like bricks, mats and diamonds. Over the last few years, the men and women employed here have also added home linen, stoles and *dupattas* to their repertoire (00-91-7283-273959/ 603; www.rehwasociety.org; 10am – 6pm; stoles from ₹ 800, saris from ₹ 2,500).

SAFETY

The hotel itself is completely safe, but avoid stepping outside its walls alone after dark.

**MEDICAL AID**

Less than 2km from Ahilya Fort is **Maheshwar Government Hospital** (00-91-7283-273109, Maheshwar). In case of a major medical emergency, it would be advisable to make your way back to Indore.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Children under the age of 18 can share their parents' room at an additional cost of ₹ 3,500/ child or get a 25 per cent discount on separate rooms. But we suggest you make this a romantic getaway, without kids in tow.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * The palace is constructed in the Maharashtrian *wada* style, with wooden pillars and supporting beams of lime and mortar. Most of the original structure is still in place.
- * Maheshwar is a conservative town, so it's important to dress modestly when outside the hotel.
- * The **Datta Temple** in Mandleshwar (8km from Maheshwar) holds a special *puja* in honour of Albert Einstein in April every year.
- * Ask the hotel to arrange a meeting with Basant Maheshwarkar for a low-down on the history of Ahilya Fort.

THE SEASONS. THE TIDES. YOUR BODY CLOCK. YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION.

CRITICAL

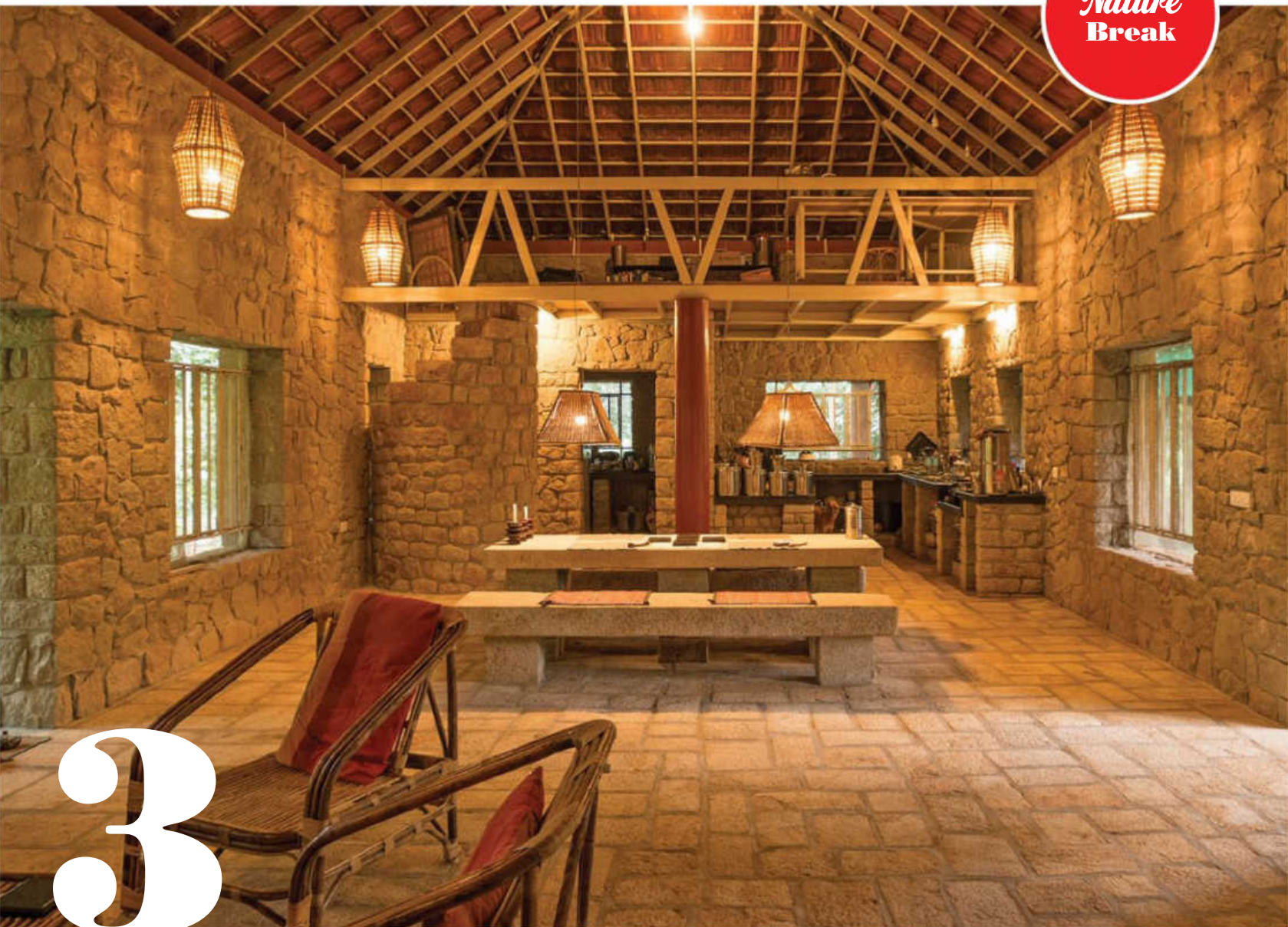
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TRAVEL WELL

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Thekkady, Idukki, Kerala

COUNTRYSIDE CHIC

It's an exquisite view from behind the sheer curtains of the four-poster bed – French doors opening out to a private patio beyond which the infinity pool reflects the lush green hills. You're in one of the elegant pool villas at [Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House](#), a seven-acre property surrounded by hills. When the rains arrive, Thekkady is *the* place to head to, and not just for the Periyar Tiger Reserve, but also for the lovely stay options that have sprung up here.

Aanavilasam is just one such option (closed from May 1 – Jul 15; see *Fact File* for all details). Although it'll take you a while to find it, once you reach, you realise

that all good things are worth the effort. With its six spacious rooms, the boutique property is a perfect blend of countryside charm and pure indulgence. Elevated wooden bridges lead to your room; luxurious open bathrooms with smooth pebble floors, wrap-around verandahs with views of the plantation and a lovely living room replete with a fireplace complete the picture. A short guided stroll around the plantation will have you sniffing cardamom, sampling pepper and peeking into byres.

This is the perfect place to bunk down at especially if you're planning to visit the

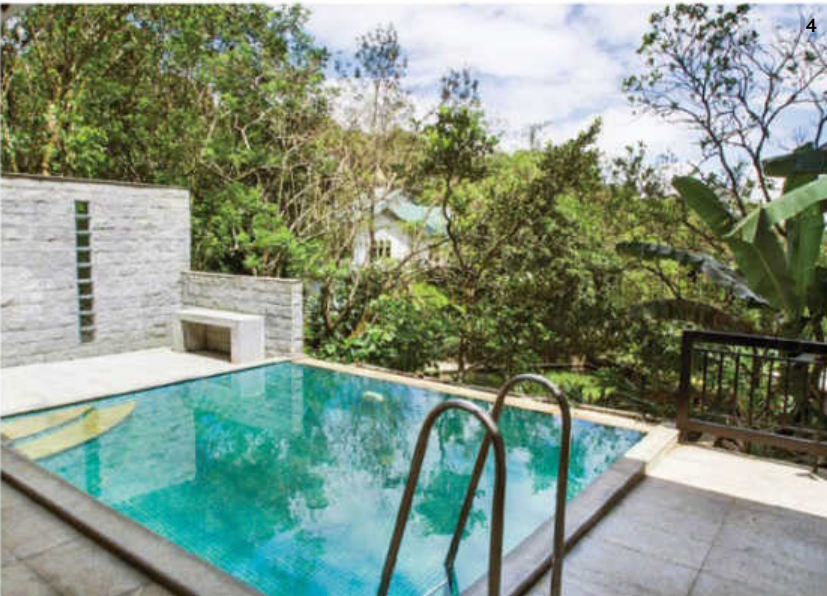
Above: The owner's home, which doubles up as the common area, at the eco-friendly Indhrivanam, is minimalistic in design and extremely charming
Below: When in Thekkady, take the time to sample delicious local dishes



[Periyar Tiger Reserve](#). Despite the name, the chances of spotting the cat here are slim, but the early morning treks through the thick jungles and boat rides on the picturesque Periyar Lake make it worth a visit nonetheless (see *Good to Know*).

Not too far away is a completely different but equally fantastic stay option. [Indhrivanam](#) has only one delightfully cosy cottage.

The property sure lives up to the eco-friendly tag and a chat with the owner Sarah over a meal reveals all kinds of interesting nuggets about nature. Work off all that delicious, fresh veg food, with a walk along the mapped-out trails, one of which leads through the property's



GREAT FROM

Kochi, Bangalore

GREAT FOR

Escaping the noise

GO NOW

For glorious greenery.

wilderness to a gorgeous viewpoint. The owners incorporate rainwater harvesting, compost all biodegradable products and use dry toilets. Yep, you read that right. Don't worry, it's completely hygienic and uses sawdust and water to get rid of waste, which collects

in a bucket at the back and is regularly emptied into the composting area. It's really not as strange as it sounds; other than having to squat a little differently, you'll hardly notice the difference.

If you're in Thekkady for a romantic retreat, a lovely option lies hidden within a 100-acre cardamom plantation. **Mayapott** is perfect for a quiet escape. Built around the natural rock formations in the area, the structure is divided by a pretty little waterfall and meandering brook running the length of the property. On one side are spacious rooms designed with the intention of bringing a bit of the natural beauty indoors. There's also a quaint

1. Head out for a guided walk through the plantations of Mayapott

2. Periyar Tiger Reserve is worth a visit for an early-morning nature trek

3 & 4. Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House, complete with an infinity pool, is perfect for a quiet, romantic escape

5. Rooms at Mayapott are huge but cosy

stone bridge that connects the rooms to the dining area. When you're ready to tear yourself away from the room, explore the working plantation where you'll be taken through the processes involved in the production of spices and also get to taste some. The early morning guided hike up to the surrounding hillock is a must-do here. The seven-odd kilometre trail winds its way through the plantation past a few tiny waterfalls to the top where the two of you can settle down and enjoy the incredible panoramic views of Thekkady's hills.

WORDS NADEZNA SIGANPORIA
PHOTOGRAPHS VINOBHA NATHAN

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Bangalore (508km)

Closest city: Kochi (157km)

Closest airport: Cochin International Airport (143km). AirAsia, Jet Airways, Air India, SpiceJet and IndiGo fly to Kochi from Bangalore (return fares from ₹ 3,455).

Closest railhead: Kottayam (KTYM; 107km).

Take the daily 16526 Kanyakumari Express

(leaves Bangalore City Junction Station [SBC] 8pm, arrives KTYM 8.55am; ₹ 995 Third AC) and return by the daily 16525 Bangalore Express (leaves KTYM 4pm, arrives SBC 7.20am; ₹ 995 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

All hotels can arrange transfers from the airport. We liked the services of **Travelcart India** (00-91-484-2663533; www.travelcartindia.com, mail@travelcartindia.com; from ₹ 2,000/ day for an AC car).

**WHERE TO STAY****Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation**

House: 00-91-4869-263777, 00-91-9446023259; www.aanavilasam.com, aanavilasam@gmail.com; Pathumury-Aanavilasam Rd; closed from May 1 – Jul 15; from ₹ 6,500 (Jul 15 – Sept 30) with breakfast, rates vary as per season

Indhrivanam: 00-91-9633110645; www.indhrivanam.com, mail@indhrivanam.com; Valiyapara Rd, Chakkupallam, Kumily; ₹ 6,500 (Mar – Sept) with breakfast, afternoon snacks and dinner

Mayapott: 00-91-486-2223577; www.mayapott.com, bookings@spicetreeunnar.com; Kadamakuzhy, Vallakadavu; from ₹ 12,500 (May 1 – Sept 30) with breakfast and dinner and in-house activities, rates vary as per season

**WHERE TO EAT & DRINK**

Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House serves a set meal for dinner and has

a limited à la carte menu for lunch (dinner: ₹ 1,000/ person). **Indhrivanam** serves mouth-watering vegetarian home-cooked food (included in the tariff), but doesn't serve lunch. **Mayapott** offers delicious local cuisine with a few Indian dishes on offer (lunch or dinner: ₹ 650/ person).

**SHOPPING**

You can buy cardamom from the plantation at **Mayapott** (as per daily rate) and home-grown coffee beans at **Aanavilasam Luxury Plantation House** (from ₹ 300/ 500g).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Rain gear, light jacket, comfy shoes and motion-sickness medication

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

About two hours into the drive, **Sicilia Hotel** is a good loo and refreshment stop about two hours into the drive (near KSRTC Station, Thodupuzha), as is **Hotel Paray Residency**, about three hours into the drive (Main Central Rd,

Above: Cocooned in a 100-acre cardamom plantation, Mayapott is quaint and private

Below: Thekkady is an ideal place for bird-watching



Moovattupuzha, Ernakulam District).

**MEDICAL AID**

The nearest hospital to Mayapott is **St John Hospital** (00-91-4868-272230; stjohns.co.in; Kattappana), while **St Augustine Hospital** (00-91-4869-222042; Spring Valley, Kumily) is close to the other two properties.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Kids might enjoy an elephant ride through the plantations at **Elephant Junction** (00-91-4869-224142; Farm Tourism, Murukkady, Kumily; 9am – 5.30pm; ₹ 400/ 30-minute ride).

GOOD TO KNOW

* **Periyar Tiger Reserve:** 00-91-4869-224571; www.periyartigerreserve.org; Information centre, Ambadi Jn, Kumily; entry: ₹ 33 adult, ₹ 5 child upto 12, nature walk: ₹ 1,200 for upto four people for a three-hour walk, boat ride: ₹ 225 adult, ₹ 75 child upto 12 years
* For a bit of local culture, head out to **Kadathanadan Kalari & Navrasa Kathakali Centre** in Kumily, where you can feast your eyes on a theatrical kathakali performance or a dramatic kalaripayattu (traditional martial arts) show (00-91-9961740868, 00-91-4869-222988; www.kalaripayattu.co.in; Thekkady Rd, Kumily; kalaripayattu show: 6pm – 7pm, kathakali show: 5pm – 6pm, 7pm – 8pm; ₹ 200/ show).

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4 Thimphu, Bhutan

TALES FROM THE KINGDOM

When you first arrive in Thimphu, you'll find it hard to believe you've driven into the capital of a kingdom. The streets are clean, everything looks tidy and it's certainly well planned. Standing atop Buddha Point, you can really see the glory of the city stretched out along the valley, carved out by the Thimphu Chhu River from end to end. It's easy to tell which parts of the city have come up more recently, clustered as they are to form complexes with a patch of lawn buried in the centre as opposed to the traditional, large, standalone houses with hugely detailed carvings on their wooden beams.

There are sporting facilities bunged in along the valley too. As you survey the city, the view trails off behind the woods toward the Tashichho Dzong and the king's palace.

And, if you turn away from the valley view, you'll be faced by a 169ft-tall Buddha made of bronze and shrouded in gold, smiling down on you. Though still under construction, it's already the most impressive sight in Thimphu. The prayer services haven't begun yet, so, if you're seeking spiritual solace, head to the **National Memorial Chorten**, a short drive away, and join the devoted in prayer and breathe a wish while you're at it (*Chorten Lam*).

Goddess Lhamu with her offering of water at the National Memorial Chorten



Then again, you can't come to Thimphu and *not* visit the crafts bazaar on **Norzin Lam** to check out the bright, woven fabrics and intricate masks, apart from the various handicrafts on offer, some of which are said to be carved out of bones – yak and human! Don't dwell on it though; carry on instead for a stroll, stopping to play with the rosy-cheeked toddlers running out from their mothers' shops. Sooner rather than later, your legs will tire and your throat will get parched. That's when you scope out one of the many restaurants around the market, like **Seasons Pizzeria**, and sit back on the massive picnic tables on the porch with a glass of the local Druk lager,



1



2



3



4



5

GREAT FROM

India

GREAT FOR

Hikes, nature, great food

GO NOW

It's rainy but cool and misty in August, plus there's no humidity.

while the chef whips up a pizza (see *Where to Eat*). If pub-hopping and toddling around the market aren't your thing, hike to the **Phajoding Monastery** with a licensed guide (see *Good to Know*) or indulge in archery with the locals.

An evening drive up towards the **Takin Preserve Motithang** (*Sangaygang*) to see the takin (a rare creature that looks like a cross between a goat and an antelope) is in order to end your day. Even if you aren't particularly interested in visiting the open-air zoo itself, the views are absolutely staggering from this end of Thimphu, with the rows of prayer flags on the hillside adding a great deal of colour. On the way back to town, pop into **Tashichho Dzong**, which opens only after 5pm, once the king has called it a day in his office (*Chhagchhen Lam*; 5.30pm – 6.30pm). Understandably, security is stringent and you're allowed to visit only one section of the monastery. The scale

1. Thimphu's skyline is dotted with dzongs
2. Pick up one of these ceremonial masks for your home
3. Lounging amid scenic pastures is a great way to de-stress, even if you're a monk
4. Ema datshi, chillies in a cheesy gravy, is Bhutan's national dish. Dig in and you'll know why
5. A monk meditates by a prayer wheel, the size of a room

of the structure is impressive, to say the least, and the brightly-painted, carved façade of the temple is a thing to behold as each pillar tells a different story.

Thimphu offers a mix of everything Bhutanese: shopping centres, quaint little crafts bazaar, plenty of eating options with the choice of a couple of noisy nightclubs as well. But you also have the option of leaving it all behind to picnic on the banks of the rapidly flowing Chhu River, hike along the hillsides or just sit in silent meditation, lighting up your own set of butter lamps.

WORDS DEBABRATA SARKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest airport: The only international airport in Bhutan is in Paro. Flying is the easiest – although a slightly expensive – way to get to Bhutan. Drukair offers flights from Mumbai, New Delhi, Kolkata, Gaya, Guwahati and Bagdogra (www.drukair.com.bt; return fares from ₹ 19,500), but doesn't operate daily, so check the flight schedule.

Closest railhead: New Jalpaiguri (NJP; 310km) is the closest major railway station from Thimphu. However, **Hasimara** is the closest railhead (HSA), and will cut the lengthy (roughly three hour), and uncomfortable road journey between NJP and the border town of Phuentsholing (gates open 6am – 8pm). The 13149 Kanchankanya Exp

is your best option (leaves Kolkata Sealdah [KOAA] 8.30pm, arrives Hasimara 10.18am; ₹ 1,005 Third AC). Return by the 13150 Kanchankanya Express (leaves HSA 4.42pm, arrives KOAA 8.15am; ₹ 1,005 Third AC). The border is 20km from the station; you can hire a rickshaw to get there (about ₹ 100). Once you get your permit at Phuentsholing, hire a cab (₹ 2,500), or hop onto one of the buses to Thimphu (about ₹ 250).

GETTING AROUND

Hiring a cab for the day is the best way to get around Thimphu, as the city bus service is irregular (₹ 2,000/ day to visit the sights around Thimphu). The cab drivers will also double up as guides and give you the local stories for the places you visit.

WHERE TO STAY

Dorji Elements: Located a stone's throw away from the Thimphu Chhu, this is an excellent mid-range hotel with comfy rooms and a modern ambience. The main market is a bit of an uphill walk from here. Opt for one of the rooms with a balcony (00-975-2-333-075; www.hoteldorjielements.com, hoteldorjielements@gmail.com; Chang Lam, Lower Chubachu; from ₹ 3,500 with free wi-fi).

Taj Tashi: This is Thimphu's premier stay option, often visited by the royal family and dignitaries from around the world. Pick from five grades of well-appointed rooms and luxurious suites. All rooms face the river valley, but you can't see the river itself. Its restaurants offer a wide selection of food, including

local cuisine. There's a bar and tea lounge as well as a spa. The lovely landscaped lawn has an area in which to practise your archery skills (00-975-2-336-699; www.tajhotels.com, tajtashi.thimphu@tajhotels.com; Samten Lam, Chubachu; from ₹ 25,500 with breakfast).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Possibly the best pizzas in Thimphu are to be had at **Seasons Pizzeria**. You can choose from a range of veg and non-veg pizzas or even opt for a steak. Order your desserts in time, or you won't get any, as the last order is taken by 9pm (00-975-2-327-413; Doendrup Lam, ask in Hong Kong Market for directions; large pizzas from ₹ 250). Set in an idyllic corner, in a traditional Bhutanese house with an apple orchard for a garden,

Folk Heritage Restaurant is a must-visit and not just for the setting. The traditional set local meals use organic ingredients, are incredibly good and have many veg options. Reserve your spot for lunch or dinner because it tends to fill up pretty fast (00-975-2-334-637; Folk Heritage Museum, Kawangjangsa, near National Institute for Zorig Chusum; 9am – 8pm Mon – Sat; from ₹ 500).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Light woollens or warm jackets, rain gear and good hiking boots

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

Most restaurants have clean facilities and, if you absolutely need to go, nothing in Thimphu is more than half an hour away from your hotel.

**SHOPPING**

The crafts bazaar is quite literally in the middle of Thimphu. Several small stalls sell handicraft items like brightly-coloured drapes and intricate carvings on bone. Bargain everywhere, as prices here are generally inflated. The market opens by about 10am and is on till 7pm. Also shop at the **National Institute of Zorig Chusum** where all the items in the shop are a product of the traditional arts school (Pedzoe Lam; school timings: 10am – 12pm, 2pm – 3.30pm Mon – Fri, 10am – 12pm Sat).

SAFETY

The Bhutanese are generally friendly and respectful, and most establishments in Thimphu are run by women.

**MEDICAL AID**

The biggest hospital in Bhutan, the **Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital**, is located in Thimphu (00-975-2-324-817; www.jdwnrh.gov.bt; Gongphel Lam).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Plan your trip using the official government website (tourism.gov.bt).
- * **Visa:** Indians don't need a visa to visit Bhutan; carry a valid passport.
- * **Currency:** 1 Bhutanese Ngultrum (BTN) = ₹ 1. Indian currency is widely accepted in Bhutan (except for ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 notes).
- * **Embassy of India, Thimphu:** www.indianembassythimphu.bt
- * Take a day or so to acclimatise if you're planning to hike.

3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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5 Le Farm, Kamshet, Maharashtra

RAINY DAY RETREAT

There's a certain romance associated with the monsoon – the pitter-patter of raindrops against a glass pane, green shoots unfurling their leaves, steam rising from a cup of tea and a plate of *pakodas*. You decide to head out and savour a slice of this dreamy monsoon state, only to realise that everyone else had exactly the same idea, which is why you're stuck in a snaking line of cars headed to Lonavala or Khandala.

This is where Le Farm comes in like a breath of fresh air. The 15-minute drive up from the main Kamshet Village sets the tone for the rest of the getaway. Chances are yours will be the only car

on the road, driving past terrain so green it hurts the eye, with brightly-coloured flowers, dogs, cattle, and the odd local peeping back at you.

When you arrive at Le Farm, you realise that, despite the name, there's nothing French about it. The entrance is a mish-mash of traditional Balinese statues and a Japanese-inspired koi pond, with interiors done up in a fish-and-bird mural, Renaissance prints, Grecian plates and shelves of books (with a healthy dose of nooks and crannies in which to curl up). Seriously, there's a huge collection of popular and obscure titles, so much so that each room has its own library-cum-reading alcove.

With three windows opening onto the lake and the pouring rain, who wants to get out of bed?

The best thing about Le Farm, though, has to be the terrace sit-out on the first floor. The villa borders the man-made **Uksan Lake**, and there's nothing – no building, no people – to give you the slightest indication of civilisation. The views from here, when the sun and rain clouds paint the surrounding hills and placid waters in kaleidoscopic hues, beg you to spend hours with a camera and a cup of tea.

Soon, a delicious sense of lethargy is bound to seep into your bones, but it's worth getting off your backside and asking the caretaker, Narayan Kaka, to take you on a tour of the property to understand how 'farm' comes into



GREAT FROM Mumbai

GREAT FOR

A do-nothing break;
rain-washed greenery

GO NOW

To enjoy the rain from a cosy cocoon.

the picture. Nine acres of the property are dedicated to plantations, mostly mango trees (which are sadly barren as the harvest season ends just before the monsoon), with a pocket dedicated

to lemons, *amla* and custard apples. It's a pleasant walk, especially if Sherry the adorable labrador accompanies you.

Once you've had your fill of the villa, head to [Kondeshwar Temple](#), 8km away. Cars can't go right to the top during the monsoon, but the 2km trek is easy and has good lookout points along the way. Skip the [Shiva Temple](#) there and head to the roaring layered waterfall right behind it with a series of lovely pools for drinking from and bathing in. There's absolutely nothing around though, so carry water and snacks and be careful as you climb down to the lower pools.

It's also worth asking a local to accompany you to the [Shirde bridge](#),

1. There are plenty of board games to keep you from getting bored while it rains down

2. The Shirde bridge overlooks a pristine stretch of the Kundalika River on each side

3. From Enid Blyton to Dostoevsky, there's a book for every type of reader

4. Take a tour of the mango, lemon and *amla* plantations

5. The terrace is the perfect spot for *chai* and *pakodas*

a narrow span that provides stunning vistas of the Kundalika River stretching away on both sides. It's an easy walk down from the bridge to the edge of the river too, where you can perch on the rocks for a moment of introspection, or a quick bite to eat.

This is one of those breaks in which you might not come away with wild stories of adventure, or memory sticks filled with daring shots. But, for the sense of rejuvenation and the chance to enjoy the rain from a cosy cocoon, this is one memorable trip indeed.

WORDS KANIKA GUPTA

PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest airport: Pune airport (65km), but, if you're coming from outside Maharashtra, taking a flight to Mumbai Airport instead is more economical and offers better connectivity.

Closest railhead: Kamshet (12km) is the closest railway station, but has poor connectivity and inconvenient timings. It's best to drive down, but, if you must take a train, **Talegaon Station** (26km) is a more convenient option. Take the **11007 Deccan Express**

(leaves Mumbai CST [CSTM] 7am, arrives at Talegaon [TGN] 10.08am; ₹ 290 AC Chair Car) and return by the **11008 Deccan Express** (leaves TGN 4.08pm, arrives at CSTM 7.35pm; ₹ 290 AC Chair Car).

GETTING AROUND

Having a car at your disposal is ideal, both for getting to Le Farm and for exploring the scenic points around it. If you aren't driving, you should rent a car. We used **Anfa Travels** (00-91-9821352189 [Laeq]; ₹ 2,800/ day for an AC Indigo).

**WHERE TO STAY**

Le Farm: Spread across 15 acres and adjoining Uksan Lake, this modern year-old villa has six rooms that come with huge, lake-facing bay windows, sitting areas, outdoor patios and spacious bathrooms, giving you an airy feeling even when you're barricaded inside by the rain. The suite on the first floor is especially stunning, with a four-poster bed, a jacuzzi, and windows on three sides. Large groups can book the whole villa, and couples can enjoy the romantic seclusion weekdays bring (00-91-9920243309; www.lefarm.in, info@lefarm@gmail.com; near Tata Power Somwadi Dam, Vadivali Lake, Maval Taluka; ₹ 6,000/ room, ₹ 10,000/ suite Mon – Thur, villa [for 12 people]: ₹ 40,000/ day Mon – Fri and Sun, ₹ 50,000 Sat).

**WHERE TO EAT**

The cook at Le Farm serves up

simple home-style cooking: *dal* and two *sabzis* or chicken for lunch and dinner, and eggs to order and *poha* or *upma* for breakfast, accompanied by a plate of sweet *kesar* mangoes from the farm. Our favourite was the piping hot *kanda bhajji* and *batata vadas* with tea on the rainy evenings. Supplies need to be bought in advance though, so plan your meals at the time of booking if you want something specific (₹ 1,500/ person/ day). On the way to or from Le Farm, you should stop by the popular **Toni Da Dhaba** on the old Mumbai-Pune Highway for excellent kebabs (as well as emu, for the more adventurous) and beer (00-91-9890695937; 9am – 1am; chicken tikka: ₹ 310/ plate, emu chilli: ₹ 500/ plate).

**WHAT TO PACK**

An umbrella, raincoat, shoes with a good grip and quick-dry pants are a must to make the most of the monsoon.

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

McDonald's at Kalamboli and **Nishi Sagar** attached to the Hindustan Petroleum pump (off Mumbai-Pune Highway) on the way in are your best bets (they even have soap and toilet paper), while **Food Mall** on the way back makes the cut (**Bharat Petroleum Pump**, off Mumbai-Pune Highway, Talegaon).

**SHOPPING**

There's nothing really you can buy around here, except for fruits like jackfruit from the main Kamshet market.

SAFETY

Although Le Farm has a caretaker on call 24/ 7, it's totally secluded, which is something women travellers should bear in mind when booking. Also watch out for the slippery mud tracks in the monsoon, especially at the Kondeshwar Temple falls.

**MEDICAL AID**

There are a number of hospitals and doctors in the main Kamshet Village like **Kamshet Hospital & Maternity Center** (00-91-2114-262014; Shivaji Chowk, on the old Mumbai-Pune Highway).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Le Farm has a collection of popular children's authors like Enid Blyton and JK Rowling, board games, a cricket set and a small children's pool on hand, and there's also a resident labrador and a couple of turtles for them to spend time with. The main house has a well-equipped kitchen to meet the special dietary needs of younger children.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * The service at Le Farm is quite rudimentary – the caretaker isn't always around as he has duties around the property, so it's best to take his cell number on arrival.
- * Although you will get cellular reception at Le Farm, it's a bit iffy, especially in the rooms.
- * Carry extra drinks (both the spirited and unspirited kind) and snacks: there's nothing additional available at the property and the closest provision stores are 8km away in Kamshet.

Features

PG 70 Get your adrenaline pumping with any of our many **easy adventure ideas** from across the world, from walking in Corsica to exploring caves in Meghalaya | **PG 100** Climb a volcano, watch sea-turtles make their first journey, and more with our **Perfect Trip through Java**, Indonesia | **PG 116** A dummies' guide to the outdoors – master **the art of camping** with our easy guide | **PG 120** Seoul's biggest birthday party: the **Lotus Lantern Festival**, in photographs

Whale-watching off the coast of New Zealand, just one of the easy adventures that awaits, pg 70



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

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Easy ADVENTURES

Adventure need not be the preserve of hard-core explorers only – with a little imagination, some of the world's most exciting travel experiences are accessible to all



1 Take a coastal road-trip in the USA

California's **Big Sur** is fringed by what is possibly the world's most distinguished ribbon of tarmac. **Coastal State Route 1** has inspired film-makers and writers, been name-checked in platinum records, and still makes most drivers feel like they're starring in a cinematic car chase. It's easy to see why: the road bends gracefully from one location-shot panorama to the next, the thundering waves of the Pacific down below providing a rousing score. Driving from one end to the other takes only two or three hours, but there are lots of reasons to pull over.

Heading south from the town of Carmel, the road runs past the beaches and coves of **Point Lobos State Reserve**, where sea lions sunbathe beside churning seas (swimming here isn't safe, unless you're a sea lion). The view from **Bixby Creek Bridge** (pictured) demands a stop, and the road then continues through a landscape of cliffs, redwood forests, waterfalls and lonely lighthouses. **Hearst Castle**, the 1920s hilltop home of news tycoon William Randolph Hearst, makes for a grand finale. Appropriately enough, it provided inspiration for Big Sur homeowner Orson Welles's landmark movie, *Citizen Kane*. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Big Sur** stretches south from Monterey, 160km south of San Francisco, and ends near Gorda. See www.bigsurcalifornia.org.
- Cathay Pacific, United Airlines, Emirates, Etihad Airlines and Delta Airlines fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to San Francisco (from ₹ 85,000 return), where car hire starts at around ₹ 5,300/ day.





2 Camel trek in Jordan's deserts

Ever since Lawrence of Arabia stomped through the deserts of Jordan nearly a century ago, **Wadi Rum** has fired the imaginations of would-be adventurers. A series of valleys carved through soaring sandstone and granite formations, Wadi Rum has a vast, natural beauty that is utterly spellbinding. The best way to experience

it is as the local nomadic Bedouin do – on a camel. A trek might consist of a few slow hours' amble on camelback, stopping to share tea with a local as a fiery sunset turns the desert orange, or a more ambitious multi-day expedition, worthy of a proper bona fide explorer, sleeping in a traditional goat-hair tent beneath a starry sky – just as Lawrence himself did almost a hundred years ago.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Bedouins of Wadi Rum** is among the companies that can arrange camel-trekking itineraries (www.bedouinsofwadirum.com; from ₹15,500). Explore runs a nine-day **Lawrence's Arabia** tour including Wadi Rum, Petra and more (www.explore.co.uk; from ₹56,750).
- Wadi Rum is four hours' drive on sealed roads from Jordan's capital Amman. Royal Jordanian, Kuwait Airways, Etihad Airways and Air Arabia fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to Amman (from ₹36,000 return). Airport car hire starts at around ₹3,500/day (www.europecar.com).





3 Wander in Sri Lankan tea fields

Slurping tea is a veritable art form in Sri Lanka's **Hill Country** – a high-altitude region in the heart of the nation, home to mountains draped in mist and lakes so flat that they look like mirrors. Expat tea planters made their homes here in the 19th century, and echoes of the British Empire endure even now, with period polo grounds, golf clubs and lavish bungalows in abundance. Their legacy on the landscape is even more pronounced:

terraced hillsides carpeted with bright emerald tea bushes. Tea pickers in colourful saris move among them, plucking leaves with an almost hypnotic rhythm. To better understand their craft and its heritage, take a tour of the 1930s-era **Norwood factory**. After visiting the roasting, rolling and drying rooms, groups are given a tea-tasting session – smelling, swirling and sipping their way through different local brews. Your afternoon cuppa will never taste the same again. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Stay at **Ceylon Tea Trails**, a bungalow resort spread out in locations close to the town of Hatton. A tea factory tour is included in the price (www.teatrails.com; bungalow for two from ₹ 42,500 with all meals).
- SpiceJet, SriLankan Airlines, Mihin Lanka, Air India and Jet Airways fly direct from Indian metros to Colombo (from ₹ 16,700 return). From Colombo, it's a five-hour drive to the resort. Ceylon Tea Trails can arrange transfers.



PHOTOGRAPHS: PHILIP LEE HARVEY, JOE WINDSOR-WILLIAMS



4 Catch some rays in the Caribbean

Watching a dozen metre-wide sea monsters – each armed with a venomous barbed sting – gliding towards you is one of the more electrifying experiences you can enjoy in three-metre-deep waters. A sort of submarine dinner party takes place daily at **Stingray City**, a popular rallying point for rays in Grand Cayman's North Sound. Legend has it their gatherings are a legacy of local fisherfolk who cleaned their catch in these calm waters, attracting peckish fish. The fishermen are gone today, but the rays still shimmy in for snacks. Kit up and prepare to feel the strange sucking kiss of these graceful creatures – just resist the temptation to touch them in return, to avoid interfering with their protective coating. Though you are asked to shuffle rather

than walk along the seabed so as not to step on a ray, the creatures are very docile and there is little to fear.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Stingray City is best dived in the afternoon, after the cruise ships have left. **Red Sail Sports** offers a Stingray City scuba dive, taking 2½ hours (www.redsailcayman.com; from ₹ 5,100).
- Delta Airlines, Air France and KLM Royal Dutch fly to Grand Cayman (from ₹ 94,000 return).



PHOTOGRAPHS: BROWN CANNON/INTERSECTION PHOTOS, STEPHEN FRINK/GETTY IMAGES



5 Be a cowboy in Montana, USA

If Westerns are to be believed, the key competencies for successful cowboyhood are gun-slinging, rootin' tootin' and the ability to turn a raucous bar dead silent by taking one small step through the front door. In the real world, a cowboy does much as his name suggests – herds cattle. There are few places better to master the skills than in the prairies of Montana. Dude ranches abound in this empty state – perhaps the best named is **Lonesome Spur** ranch, a working cattle operation in **Gallatin National Forest** (pictured). Holing up in log cabins, apprentice cowboys

spend days helping out on the ranch: fixing fences and honing their lassoing technique, maybe also perfecting the classic cowboy-style, misty-eyed squint into the middle distance. After long days chasing misbehaving cows around the pastures, guests get to savour the poetic justice of prime Montana beef served for dinner. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

● Rates at the **Lonesome Spur** include meals (www.lonesomespur.com; six nights for two from ₹ 1,04,000). Transfers from Billings Airport arranged through the ranch cost from ₹ 9,500.

● Delta Airlines, Air France and KLM Royal Dutch fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to Billings, Montana with stops (from ₹ 94,000 return).





6 Sail Croatia's Dalmatian Coast

Local legend has it that Marco Polo was born on the Dalmatian Island of **Korčula** – but you don't need to be a world-changing adventurer to discover Croatia's Adriatic shores. With reliable wind, abundant uncrowded anchorages and near-endless summer sun, the Dalmatian Coast is one of the world's most easily navigated sailing destinations. Add to that the region's long and varied history,

and you have the makings of the perfect maritime adventure. **Island hopping off Dalmatia** is as much about time on land as time at sea. Cruise your yacht among the 147 (mostly uninhabited) **Kornati Islands**, where impossibly clear waters fringe sculpted cliffs and caves. Try **Mljet Island** as well, with its pine-forested national park. Or simply see where the wind takes you; there are countless stretches of sand and secret coves only a sailor can reach.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

● **Sunsail** is among the companies offering sailing courses, with a five-day programme based near Trogir (www.sunsail.co.uk; from ₹ 54,500). May, June, September and October are the seasons preferred by experienced sailors in Croatia: though winds may be more challenging, there's solitude to be had on the water.

● Split's airport is closest to Trogir. The city is served by flights from Mumbai and New Delhi by airlines like Swiss, Lufthansa, Aeroflot and Air India (from ₹ 54,500 return).





7 Drift through Namibian skies

The first passengers to travel in a hot-air balloon were not aeronautical engineers – they weren't even human. In 1783, under the gaze of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, French inventors elevated a duck, a rooster and a sheep on a flight that lasted a full eight minutes. Today, you might hope to stay aloft for a little longer, but the basics of lighter-than-air aviation haven't changed that much.



Balloons still need large open areas in which to land – which is one reason why the Namib Desert in southwestern Africa is one of the best places to do it, with around 1,29,500sqkm of predominantly empty space. But the main reason to ascend here is simply because it's so utterly astonishing: the dunes of **Sossusvlei** create sensuous billows of orange sand, crafted by the breeze into endless and ever-changing crests and swirls – features that can only be appreciated by creatures who soar high in the air above them. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Namib Sky Adventures** runs balloon trips over Sossusvlei – the precise departure location is dependent on wind conditions, with lift-off happening just before sunrise. The company offers pick-ups from several local lodges (www.namibsky.com; from ₹ 25,350/ person with a champagne breakfast).
- Kenya Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, Etihad Airways, Emirates and Air Namibia fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to the Namibian capital of Windhoek (from ₹ 50,000 return). From here, it's a six-hour drive southwest to Sossusvlei – you'll need private transport, hired at the airport.



8 Drive through the Australian outback

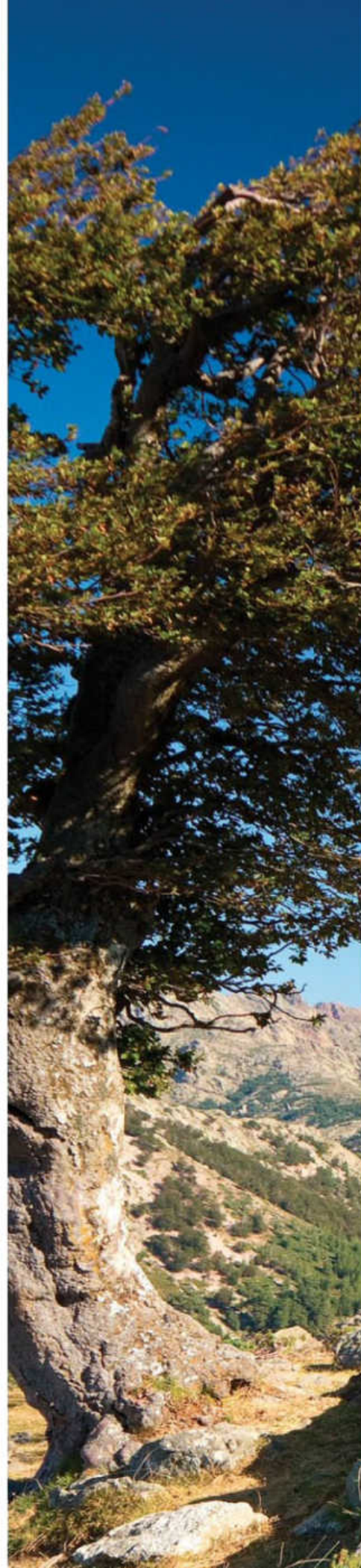
Travelling around Oz in a Kombi van isn't a mere holiday: it's a rite

of passage for Australians, the modern-day equivalent of an ancient Homeric odyssey. Something about the scale of Australia entices travellers to stock up their 'esbies' (coolers) and hit the road in classic Volkswagen campervans – vehicles that have long been a part of Aussie highway folklore. Whether you head north to the Queensland coast from Sydney, west from Adelaide, or do a circuit of the whole mainland (more than 14,485km, in case you were wondering), there are certain givens. You'll have a near-miss with a suicidal wallaby. You'll have a panic about petrol in the back of beyond. You'll also

develop an obsession with kitsch, oversized roadside objects – from humongous fibreglass dinosaurs to giant guitars, big things are a big part of highway culture Down Under. You're also guaranteed to have the time of your life.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Go Kombi** offers modern and restored campervans to rent in Rockingham in Western Australia (www.gokombi.com; from ₹ 12,400/ day), while **Hire a Kombie** rents classic vehicles from Melbourne (www.hireakombi.com; price on request).
- Malaysian Airlines, Qantas, Singapore Airlines, Jet Airways and Thai Airways fly to Melbourne (from ₹ 55,000). Any big Australian road trip requires planning: be sure to take spare tyres and water.





9 Trek Corsica's GR20 Trail

Corsica's **Grande Randonnée** (meaning, very literally, 'great walk') is a challenge to make the mouth and, on some stretches, the eyes, water. Following ancient shepherds' tracks, the 177km GR20 path weaves through the mountainous interior of this rugged Mediterranean island. It is one of Europe's toughest long-distance walks. All the same, while the going can be tough, the payoff is immense: expect alpine lakes, forests of chestnut and oak, and ospreys wheeling about over the crags. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **UTracks** offers a guided seven-day walking tour over the somewhat easier southern part of the trail, overnighting in simple mountain refuges (www.utracks.com; from ₹ 70,500 with stay and meals).
- Air France, British Airways, Jet Airways, Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines fly from Heathrow to Figari Airport at the southern end of the GR20, with a change at Paris airports (from ₹ 70,000 return).



10 Seek the wild in Canada

Who doesn't love a good wilderness lodge? At its best, it represents a chunk of paradise that allows the guest to leave the world and all of its woes behind. **Great Bear Lodge** may well be that paradise. Floating on an estuary in British Columbia and only accessible by seaplane, it's set deep in the Great Bear Rainforest, one of the largest tracts of temperate rainforest in the world (covering an area about the size of Ireland). Wildlife encounters are central to the experience –

and, in particular, the chance to see bears in the wild. Grizzlies, black bears and rare white spirit bears roam the woods. Take a boat trip to see them mating in spring, and fishing for salmon after the romance has faded and tummies are rumbling in the autumn. Wolves, too, can sometimes be heard howling behind the wall of spruces and cedars behind the lodge, while whales and dolphins have been known to break the still waters outside. The greatest pleasure, however, is simply spending time at the lodge: lazing on the timber deck by day, and, by night, dining on fresh salmon plucked from the surrounding waters, just like the bears do.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Great Bear Lodge** has eight bedrooms, and is 80km north of Port Hardy. Rates include seaplane transfers from Port Hardy, all food and drink on board and bear-watching excursions (www.greatbearlodge.com; from ₹ 93,650 for three nights).
- Air Canada, Jet Airways, Cathay Pacific, United and Delta fly to Vancouver (from ₹ 88,000). From there, fly Pacific Coastal to Fort Hardy (from ₹ 13,000).

PHOTOGRAPHS: JUSTIN FOULKES/BANANA PANCAKE LTD, TOM RIVEST/GREAT BEAR NATURE TOURS, TRAVEL LIBRARY LIMITED/SUPERSTOCK



11 Watch whales in New Zealand

Hop on a catamaran in **Kaikoura** on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island and you're likely to have an experience you'll never forget. Chugging out from the coast, the boat is soon dwarfed by the snowtipped mountains that loom over the water. To the bow, the ocean stretches out to the horizon. Birds float in the breeze above. Then, in the distance, the water breaks as if it is boiling, and the nose

of a sperm whale lifts into the air with a spray and splutter; its colossal body follows, before smacking back into the deep fathoms of the Pacific, exiting with a wave of its Y-shaped tail. The only thing that will top the sight is seeing another emerge a few seconds later.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Whale Watch Kaikoura** has a 95 per cent success rate of spotting whales on its tours. Allow a few days' flexibility for weather (www.whalewatch.co.nz; from ₹ 6,900). Buses run from Christchurch in three hours (intercity.co.nz; ₹ 1,400 return).
- Air New Zealand, Singapore Airlines, Air India and China Eastern fly with two layovers from Mumbai and New Delhi (from ₹ 65,000 return).





12 Get the bends in Norway

Norway's **Trollstigen** is an audacious 8km slither of asphalt that takes in a 1:12 gradient and 11 hairpin bends. It's not called the Troll's Road for nothing – there's a certain mythic beauty to the mountain road and the Trollstigen Valley from which it rises. Such is the drama of the journey, the road

might also be the approach to Asgard, the legendary realm of the Norse gods. It's only open to vehicles from May or June to October or November – depending on the snowfall up in the mountains and, perhaps, the whim of the gods. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

● Trollstigen is roughly a six-hour drive from the capital Oslo, and four hours from Trondheim. For more ideas of what

to do in the area, see www.visitnorway.com. Be sure to view the road from its viewing platform.

● Qatar Airways, Lufthansa, Air France, KLM Royal Dutch and Emirates fly to Trondheim with stops (from ₹ 69,000 return). Car hire is readily available at the airport (www.hertz.com; from ₹ 3,365/day).





13 Sleep in the African savannah

To truly experience the African wilderness, you need to sleep in it. On a **tented safari**, you drift into slumber to the sounds of the savannah – the racket

of a pack of baboons running through the camp or the heart-stopping roar of a distant lion – knowing that just a thin piece of canvas separates you from that herd of wildebeest or the family of elephants ambling nearby. Mornings start with a mug of coffee in a folding chair while a line of gazelles bounds past. Kenya offers tented safaris for all sizes of wallet – even the cheapest come with creature comforts such as hot showers and hot meals. One of the best budget options is **Aruba-Mara Camp**, which has simple but elegant safari tents on a shaded patch of land by Talek Gate in the Masai Mara National Reserve.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- In addition to its own spacious safari tents, **Aruba-Mara Camp** has room for guests bringing their own tents (www.aruba-safaris.com; safari tents from ₹ 5,255/ person based on twin sharing with all meals).
- Kenya Airways, Air Arabia, Qatar Airways and Jet Airways fly to Nairobi (return from ₹ 28,300). From here, it's a five-hour drive west to Talek. The camp can suggest good taxi services, which should work out cheaper than driving there yourself in a 4x4 hire car. Air Kenya also flies from Nairobi to Olkiombo Airstrip, near the camp (from ₹ 11,900 return).





14 Kayak in Vietnam

With thousands of craggy limestone peaks and islands lapped by blue waters, **Halong Bay** is one of Asia's defining landscapes. The iconic way to experience it is on one of the many wooden junks that thread their way between the many islands, but, these days it's also become a favourite with kayakers seeking a more intimate look at its incredible rock features. Typical of most limestone landscapes, Halong Bay is studded with caves, arches

and tall pillars – whichever way you point the prow of your plastic boat, you're guaranteed to find some extraordinary new highlight, and there are temples hidden away in the rock faces too. Multi-day kayaking trips are usually staged from one of the venerable old junks, where guests tuck into Vietnamese food, fall asleep to the sound of lapping waves, and wake to misty dawns. Don't leave without mooring your kayak at least once at **Titop Island** – a pyramid-shaped peak with great views over the otherworldly landscape of Halong Bay, especially beautiful at sunset.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Handspan Travel Indochina** offers a Halong Explorer and Kayak Discovery tour, with guests sleeping and eating on a traditional junk and visiting a floating village (www.handspan.com; from ₹ 18,700 return). Tours include transfers to and from Hanoi.
- Vietnam Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Thai Airways and Bangkok Airways fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to Hanoi (from ₹ 32,000 return).



15 Scale Mount Snowdon in Wales

Wales's highest mountain region is the next-best thing to climbing Mt Everest. Well, sort of. It was here, after all, that members of the 1953 Everest expedition – including Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay – trained for their big moment, as did the team that summited Kanchenjunga in 1955. Climbing headquarters is the **Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel**, set in the pass between the Snowdon and the Glyderau Range, which has a collection of memorabilia from the expedition and a ceiling

adorned with the signatures of expedition members. If all this inspires you to stage your own expedition, drop by the **Plas y Brenin Climbing Centre** a few minutes' drive away. It offers a range of guided treks through the sheep-dotted, slate-quarried Welsh landscapes, from ambles to high-octane scrambles to the peak of Mount Snowdon itself. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- The **Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel** is close to the town of Beddgelert (www.pyg.co.uk; from ₹ 10,250). **Plas y Brenin climbing centre** is in the nearby village of Capel Curig – its 'classic weekend walk' includes accommodation, learning navigation skills and a crash course in understanding and reading mountain weather (www.pyb.co.uk; from ₹ 19,200).
- The easiest way to reach Snowdonia is via the city of Bangor. Virgin Trains runs from London Euston (www.virgintrains.co.uk; from ₹ 8,880 return). From here, buses serve the walking centres of Betws-y-Coed, Beddgelert, Capel Curig and Llanberis. British Airways, Air India, Jet Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly to Heathrow (from ₹ 59,000 return).

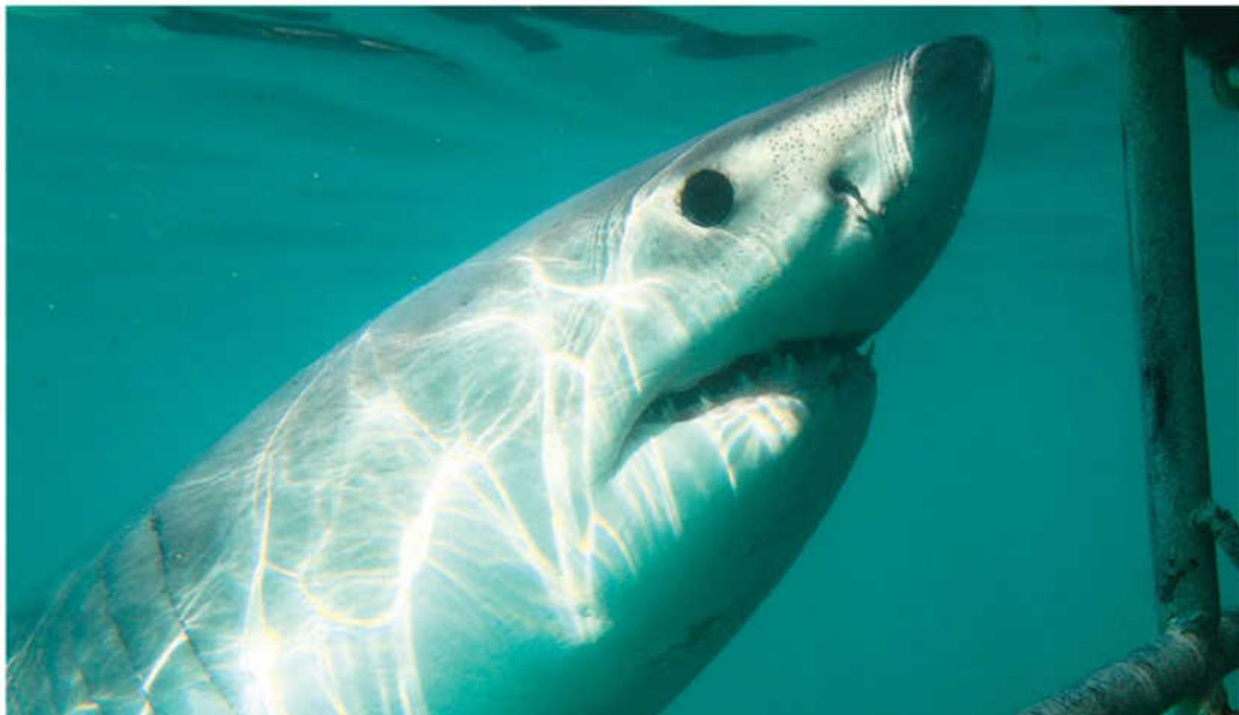


16 Hike Scotland's West Highland Way

Scotland's most famous long-distance walk runs almost 160km through constantly changing Highland scenery – a mix of Munros (peaks above 3,000 feet), hauntingly barren moors and back-and-forth switchbacks up heather-strewn slopes. One of the highlights along the route is the view from **Conic Hill**, with the sparkling waters of **Loch Lomond** grabbing the attention below. It's no wonder the planners chose to run an entire section of the trail through the majestic valley of **Glencoe**, where the grand valley is shut in by wild and precipitous mountains. Crown your accomplishment at the northern trailhead by summiting **Ben Nevis** – and looking south at the landscape you've just conquered.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- The West Highland Way runs 155km from Milngavie on the outskirts of Glasgow to Fort William, and takes around seven to nine days to finish. Many companies offer guided and self-guided tours along the trail – **Sherpa Expeditions'** self-guided packages include bag transfers, meals and accommodation (www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk; from ₹ 68,200 for 10 days with meals). The trail is best walked northward with the wind at your back.
- Fly to Glasgow from Mumbai and New Delhi on British Airways, Emirates, Air India, Virgin Atlantic and Jet Airways (from ₹ 77,000 return). From Glasgow Central, it's a 25-minute ride on a suburban train to Milngavie (www.scotrail.co.uk; from ₹ 650 return).





17 Shark dive in South Africa

Fitness needed: basic. Dive experience needed: none. Nerves of steel: 100 per cent essential. There's nothing especially difficult about cage-diving with great white sharks. You don't have to travel far offshore, and the only skill required thereafter is the ability to dangle just under the water wearing a snorkel. But – and it's a very large 'but' – you need proper backbone to lurk inches from 1,000-plus kilos of potentially thrashing, cold-eyed predator. Great whites have a bad reputation, in no small part

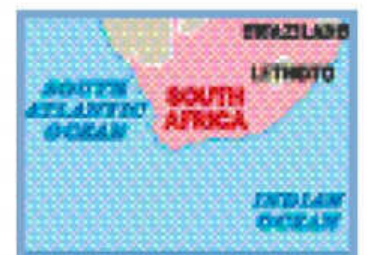
thanks to the movie *Jaws*; it's impossible to see these creatures glide silently up without hearing John Williams's terror-inducing score. They are found in many seas and oceans, but the waters off South Africa, and in particular the fishing village of **Gansbaai**, are home to one of the largest concentrations of white sharks in the world. Here, a strip of ocean has been dubbed Shark Alley, the 60,000-strong resident colony of cape fur seals providing a constant buffet. It takes just 20 minutes to motor from the harbour to the big-fish feeding ground – but the biggest thrill is descending into a steel cage (attached to the boat so it can't

sink or float away) to enter the sharks' realm. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN

● **Marine Dynamics Shark Tours** offers cage dives in Gansbaai, a two-hour drive from Cape Town (www.sharkwatchsa.com; from ₹ 8,225).

● Qatar Airways and Emirates fly to Cape Town from Mumbai and New Delhi with one stop (from ₹ 50,000 return).





18 Cycle in Cuba

Experiencing Cuba on two wheels may be the best way to see this island. Days are spent drifting along country roads, past farmers in the fields and locals offering cold drinks from their front porches. Pedal from one end

of the country to the other and you'll cover more than 1,290km, but there are easy chunks to enjoy. You might choose to take the bike lane along **Havana's** seafront, passing fishermen and canoodling lovers, or pedal along the coast, with the added bonus of discovering a beach around every bend. You could also slog up the 1,200m thigh-shredding peak of **La Gran Piedra**. By travelling under your own steam, you'll discover a Cuba out of bounds to the average bus-hopping tourist.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Intrepid's 15-day **Cycling Cuba** itinerary begins and ends in Havana (www.intrepidtravel.com; from ₹1,85,950).
- Air Canada, British Airways, Air France and KLM Royal Dutch fly to Havana (from ₹1,16,000 return).



19 Walk the Great Wall of China

Here, history literally crunches beneath your feet. The protected lands of China are to the south; the marauding hordes are to the north. At least, that's how it was proposed when the Chinese first built this incredible structure more than two millennia ago. The Great Wall of China once extended anywhere between 5,640km and 20,920km, so walking the whole thing is harder than it sounds –

the wall is in disrepair in many areas, and finding its course can be a challenge. Fortunately, lots of companies offer guided walks over surviving parts – including the majestic stretch between Jinshanling and Simatai.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Exodus offers a 10-day **Walking the Great Wall** tour, including the Jinshanling to Simatai stretch (www.exodus.co.uk; from ₹72,000). The tour starts and ends in Beijing.
- Fly Malaysian Airlines, Thai Airways, Qatar Airways, Cathay Pacific, China Eastern Air or China Southern to Beijing (from ₹35,600 return).



Lonely Planet's *Great Adventures* has more on many of the adventures featured here.

20 Discover a new world THE ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS



With pristine beaches, primeval jungle and remote tribes completely cut off from civilisation, it's hard to remember that the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a part of India. Adding to the sense of mystery is the intriguing world that exists underwater – brightly-coloured coral cities inhabited by the most fantastical and eye-catching marine life darting here and there. While you can't discover all of the Andamans' secrets, you can certainly get better acquainted with what lies underneath sparkling waters: **Havelock Island** has world-class **scuba-diving** and **snorkelling** sites, with the option of becoming a certified diver too, if you want. And when you decide to come up for a breather, there is also **sea kayaking**, **speedboating**, and **treks into the jungle** that help you fall in love with the Andamans, just a little more. ➔

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- **Barefoot Scuba** has excellent PADI-certified diving facilities (00-91-9566088560; www.diveandamans.com, dive@barefootindia.com; two-day dives: ₹ 5,000, snorkelling from ₹ 3,500/person).
- You can stay at the sea-facing eco-cottages at **Barefoot**, minutes from Radhanagar Beach on Havelock (00-91-80-40012200; www.barefoot-andaman.com, enquiries@theserai.in; from ₹ 7,500 with breakfast).
- **Port Blair's** airport is a 2.5-hour ferry ride away from Havelock.

The Great Indian Adventure

Taking on the elements of wind, water and earth (let's set fire aside for the less sane) is more accessible than ever, with this great mix of adventures for all levels of enthusiasts

PHOTOGRAPH: JYOTHY KARAT

COMPILED BY KANIKA GUPTA



21 Fly like a bird HIMACHAL PRADESH



If you've always envied the birds for their ability to glide on the air currents, **Bir and Billing** in Himachal Pradesh is the place for you. Billing, 14km up from Bir, is the take-off point for some of the best **paragliding** to be had in the world (going by the number of gliders in the air, if nothing else!). Flights last from 15 to 45 minutes, but you'll be able to see Dharamshala looking pretty as a picture, have an up-close view of the snowy Dhauladhar mountains, and feel as avian as you're ever likely to feel in this lifetime. Land gently in Bir, close to the Tibetan colony with its stupas, momos and cappuccinos, catch your breath, and do it all over again.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- **Extreme Flying Club** has both tandem joyrides and paragliding courses on offer, from after the monsoon till May (00-91-9459227776; www.extremeflyingclub.com; deshraj@extremeflyingclub.com; tandem joyride: from ₹ 2,000).
- **Colonel's Resort** is your best bet among Bir's stay options, with themed cottages, gardens, and nature treks (00-91-9882377469; www.colonelsresort.com; colonelsresort@gmail.com; from ₹ 3,000 with breakfast).
- You can fly into **Chandigarh Airport** (293km) or **Dharamshala** (65km).

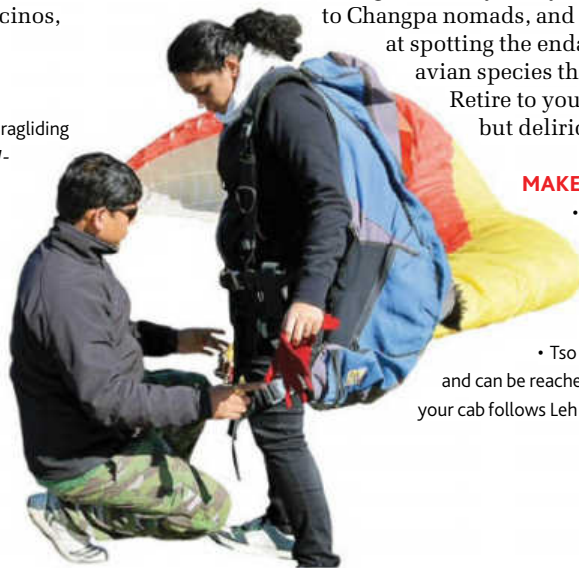
22 Go camping in Ladakh JAMMU & KASHMIR



If you have a Facebook account, you know by now that Ladakh has some of the most scenic and serene lakes to be found in India... god knows there are enough selfies with them floating around! **Tso Moriri** is one such lake, though its distance from Leh and basic accommodation make it less likely to be found in any album. The waters here are a vibrant blue, made even more so by crystal-clear reflections of the sky, and offset by the stark mountains in the background. Once you've managed to tear your eyes away, you can explore **Korzok**, home to Changpa nomads, and try your hand, or, in this case, eyes, at spotting the endangered black-necked cranes and other avian species that make this a bird-watcher's haven. Retire to your tent at night, cold, cramped, but deliriously happy.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- Sadly, you can't camp right on the lake shore, but **Tso Moriri Camps & Resort**, a little outside Korzok, has lovely views and tents with attached baths (00-91-11-40580334; www.campsofladakh.com; info@campsofladakh.com; from ₹ 3,900 with breakfast).
- Tso Moriri is best visited between April and September, and can be reached by road from **Leh**, the closest airport (220km). Ensure your cab follows Leh Taxi Union rates (from ₹ 17,500/ two days for a Sumo).





23 Explore the underground MEGHALAYA



Meghalaya is one of the wettest places on earth, which, while a total pain for its inhabitants, has helped develop an impressive network of caves in the East Khasi Hills.

One such cave is **Krem Mawmluh**, which, at 7.1km, is the fourth-longest in India, a veritable Aladdin's cave for those interested in spelunking. You'll be squeezing through the narrow opening, wading through bracing water and climbing up the sides of the cave as you go deeper underground, but the experience is well worth it, with gardens of stalacmites

and stalactites, glow-in-the-dark shrimp, underground waterfalls and a completely different yet breathtaking landscape just waiting to be discovered.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- Book your caving expedition in advance with **Kipepeo**, as the season is only from mid-October to March (00-91-9930002412; www.kipepeo.in, info@kipepeo.in; ₹ 2,500/ person/ day for minimum two people with guide and equipment).
- The closest city, **Shillong**, is 57km away, and the closest airport is in **Guwahati**, 170km away, so stay close by at the simple and clean **Cherrapunjee Holiday Resort** (00-91-9436115925; www.cherrapunjee.com, cherrapunjee@hotmail.com; from ₹ 2,730 with breakfast).

24 Rule the slopes

JAMMU & KASHMIR



Taking you up to 3,979m, the **Gulmarg Gondola** is the highest ski lift in the world, bringing you into the heart of the Agharwat Mountains, with breathtaking vistas of green woods and craggy cliffs amid blinding white snow. While that's enough adventure for most visitors to Gulmarg, some dare to go beyond and experience Gulmarg the way the British intended: as India's premier ski resort. There are plenty of gentle trails for beginners to learn on, while experienced skiers can explore the Khilanmarg meadows off-piste. Throw in the backdrop of Nanga Parbat, the world's ninth-tallest peak, and a relative lack of queues, and you've got all the makings of a world-class ski experience.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Sledding and skiing are conducted by locals in a fairly unorganised manner and it's unregulated – ask around and check prices before signing up for lessons or check with your hotel.
- **Gulmarg Gondola:** www.gulmarggondola.com; Phase 1: ₹ 600, Phase 2: ₹ 800
- **The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa**, 60km from Srinagar airport, has lovely Kashmiri-style luxury rooms amid forests of fir (00-91-9906603272; www.khyberhotels.com; info@khyberhotels.com; from ₹ 15,250 with breakfast).





26 Cycle across the south KERALA



The backwaters of Kerala offers so much to discover, in terms of nature, culture and warm hospitality, and perhaps the best way to explore and really soak it in is on a bicycle.

Start with **Bekal Fort** and the many temples around it (where you can catch a *theyyam* performance from January to March), meander through the coconut groves and backwaters at **Nileshwar** (with a spot of kayaking thrown in for good measure), explore the many museums at **Kannur** and end up at the gargantuan shipyard in **Beyppore**, Kozhikode. It's an intense physical trip and your posterior will be in serious need of some TLC, but you know what they say: "there's no gain without pain!" And, on this trip, the gains are well worth it! →

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

• **Muddy Boots** organises this four-night, five-day itinerary inclusive of stay, meals, cycle, kayak and guide (00-91-9544201249; www.muddyboots.in; ₹ 24,750/person). Bekal is 2.5 hours from Mangalore Airport (65km).

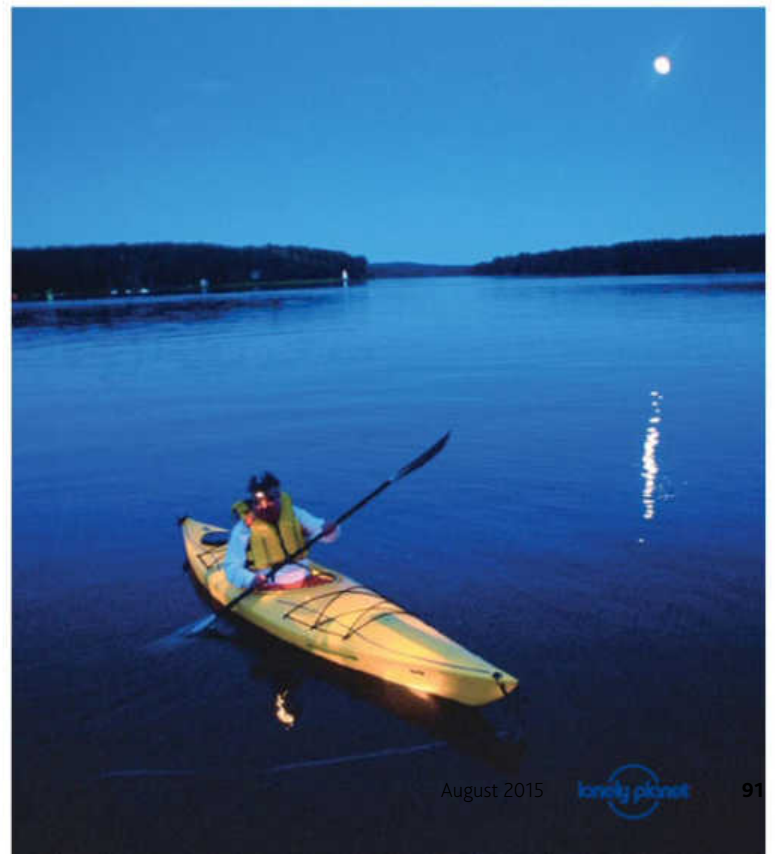
25 Kayak by moonlight GOA



For those who've always dreamed of the romance of a moonlit gondola ride on the Venetian canals, we have the next best thing: kayaking down the Zuari River in Goa by the light of the moon. The stretch from the starting point at **San Jacinto Island** to the end at the Cortalim Ferry Jetty sees the river at its broadest, bathed in a soft, silver light that makes everything seem magical. However, given that moonlight paddling is heavily dependent on the tide and the luminosity of the moon, it operates only from November to March, that too, on only five days a month (two days prior and two days after the full moon), so plan this one well in advance. It will be worth it for a glimpse of Goan nightlife that you've never experienced before!

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

• San Jacinto island is 6km away from Goa's Dabolim Airport.
• **Goa Kayaking Club** has one fixed departure each of the five nights of the full moon, for a maximum of 15 people (00-91-9422056037; www.goakayaking.com, goakayaking@gmail.com; ₹ 3,000/person with snacks and non-alcoholic beverages).



27 Get on trek ALL OVER INDIA

Sultry jungles with roaring waterfalls, abandoned battle-forts reclaimed by nature, ancient civilisations, elusive wildlife and Himalayan landscapes... there's so much in India to discover once you decide to get out and go for a walk! In **Maharashtra**, the trek up to **Vasota Fort** in Satara combines natural beauty with history (*level: hard*), while the **Prabalgad Fort** and **Kalavantindurg** near Panvel are a sight to see (*level: intermediate*), especially on a night trek when the countryside is lit up by fireflies. The 16km trek to the peak in **Kudremukh National Park**, **Karnataka**, has lush vegetation and roaring waterfalls one expects

of the Western Ghats around the monsoon (*level: hard*), whereas, up in **West Bengal**, the **Sandakhpu-Rimbik Trek** straddles Nepal and India and gives you a lofty encounter of another kind (*level: easy to intermediate*), with views of four of the world's five highest peaks. **Uttarakhand** has treks as diverse as its terrain – explore the birthplace of the *Mahabharata* and Garwhali living on the **Kalap Trek** (*level: intermediate*), or uncover the mystery of the skulls at **Roopkund Lake** (*intermediate*). And then, there's the final frontier – **Ladakh**. Explore **Hemis National Park** to spot the elusive snow leopard (*level: easy*), or take on the ultimate challenge for trekkers on the **Chadar Trek** (*pictured*) over the frozen Zaskar River (*level: intermediate to hard*). Easy or hard, day-trip or overnight, nearby or far-flung... there's plenty on this menu! ➔



PHOTOGRAPH: MAYANK SONI



MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- **Tapola Boat Club** organises the Vasota Fort trek (145km from Pune) from October to April (00-91-9421583469; boat ride: ₹ 4,500, max 6 people, guide: ₹ 450, forest entry: ₹ 30).
- For **Prabalgaad** and **Kalavantindurg**, take a train to Panvel and then a bus/ auto to Thakurwadi, the base village for the treks.
- Trek up to Kudremukh Peak with **Capture** (00-91-9845355087; www.capture-earth.com; ₹ 2,000/ two with meals, guide and jeep transfer from your resort). The closest airport is in Mangalore (97km).
- The two-day Sandakphu Trek is organised by **Help Tourism**; fly to Bagdogra Airport (96km) or take a train to New Jalpaiguri (115km) (00-91-9733000445, 00-91-353-2535896; www.help-tourism.com; ₹ 3,000/ day/ person with stay, meals and transport).
- Lohajung in Uttarakhand, 480km from New Delhi (Kathgodam Railway Station is closest; 220km), is the base for the Roopkund trek by **Indiahikes** (00-91-8971959977; www.indiahikes.in; ₹ 10,550/ person).
- **Kalap** is a responsible tourism initiative that operates treks that give back to the community (00-91-9886781587; www.kalap.in, visitkalap@gmail.com; ₹ 14,000/ person for one to two people for four nights and five days).
- **Rimo Expeditions** organises the 19-day Frozen Zaskar (Chadar) trek (mid-Jan – mid-Feb) and the 12-day Markha Valley Trek, which covers Hemis National Park (00-91-124-2806027; www.rimoexpeditions.com; from ₹ 1,39,500/ person for two for Zaskar, ₹ 85,800/ person for two for Markha). Leh Airport (60km) is a couple of hours away.



28 Stay afloat

KERALA



Spotting a tiger at the famous **Periyar Tiger Reserve** in Kerala takes a lot of time and a huge heap of luck. Fortunately, the unique bamboo rafting trek, which lasts nine hours, provides you with the former in plenty! Long walks through the dense green jungle (with breaks built in for coffee and a breather) are concluded with a three-hour excursion on the placid man-made Periyar Lake. The rafts are basic – literally bamboo sticks lashed together with rudimentary seating – but sturdy, as they glide over the water. You might not see much beyond the giant squirrel, Nilgiri langur, bison and elephants (if you're lucky), but the gentle swaying of the raft and the rejuvenating greenery are reward enough, even if you miss seeing a tiger that day.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- The trek is from 8am to 5pm, and can accommodate a maximum of 10 people/ day, so book in advance (00-91-4869-224571; www.periyartigerreserve.org, info@periyartigerreserve.org; ₹ 2,000/ person + ₹ 50 park entry, with all snacks and meals).
- The closest city, Kochi (140km) is five hours away, so stay overnight at the nearby **Rangerwood Nature Castle** (00-91-4869-222004; www.rangerwoodperiyar.com, manager@rangerwoodperiyar.com; ₹ 8,000/ couple for a one-night, two-day package with stay, meals and activities).

29 Stroll along the sea floor

GOA



Sure, you can swim, snorkel and dive underwater. But have you ever tried walking there instead? H2O WaterSports on **Baina Beach** organises an **Underwater Sea Walk** during which you can literally walk on the seabed amid brightly-coloured coral, swaying marine plants, and darting schools of fish. It's like taking a walk in the park, except with a 40kg helmet and additional weights strapped onto you (but don't worry, they weigh hardly anything once you're in the water!). It's good for non-swimmers too, and there are certified guides and divers alongside at all times to ensure utmost safety. The views are nice but nothing spectacular; the Great Barrier Reef this isn't. Still, for the thrill of actually standing on the sea bed and the chance to perfect your moonwalk impression (much easier without the pressure of gravity!), this is one walk to remember.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- Weather permitting, the Sea Walk is conducted daily from October to May (00-91-9225580080; from ₹ 2,000/ person/ 20 minutes). Baina Beach is just 4.3km from Goa's Dabolim Airport, and can be reached easily by road.



PHOTOGRAPHS: VIPURVA PAREKH (PERIAR); SULJOY/123RF (CUT OUT), JYOTHY KABAT (SURFING)

30 Ride the waves TAMIL NADU



While the name **Mahabalipuram** is met with reverence and covered heads by most, there is a small but rapidly growing section that sets out here in skimpy clothes with “Surf’s up!” on their lips. The unassuming Mahabs Beach has lovely waves, challenging but mild enough for surfing novices. Mumu, the local who introduced the sport to the town, runs **Mumu Surf School**, at which you can learn surfing (*pictured*) and also rent or buy equipment. During a 90-minute session, Mumu will introduce you to the techniques and dos and don’ts, post which you’re encouraged to get a feel of the waves and try standing (without beaming yourself in the head, hopefully). You’ll be battered and sore at the end of the session, but the utter oneness you feel with the waves will probably have you signing up for the full five-day course!

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- The best waves are caught during January to March, so book a lesson accordingly (00-91-9789844191; www.mumusurfer.wix.com/indiasurfing, mumusurfer@gmail.com; ₹ 1,000/ person for two to four people for 90 minutes, ₹ 4,500 for five-day course, all courses include surfing gear).
- **Mamalla Heritage** is a two-minute walk from Mahabs Beach, and can organise a pick-up from Chennai Airport (57km) for a fee (00-91-44-27442060; www.hotelmamallaheritage.com, info@hotelmamallaheritage.com; from ₹ 2,400).

31 Surf a kite GOA



Take a gust of windsurfing, a flight of paragliding, and a splash of wakeboarding. Mix ‘em all together, shake ‘em up real nice, and what do you get? **Kitesurfing**! This is one trippy mish-mash of an adventure sport, where you have a kite above you that’s connected to the modified surfboard under your feet. Then, once the wind blows, so do you, racing along the water! Kitesurfing isn’t as easy as that though, and you need some training in technique before trying it out on your own. **Yogi Kiting** on Morjim Beach, Goa, has an International Kiteboarding Organization (IKO)-approved instructor and offers three courses: Discovery (*three hours*), Non-Certified Course (*10 hours*) and IKO Certified Course (*16 hours*) to choose from. Whichever one you pick, you’re in for the thrill of a lifetime! →

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- The closest airport is Goa’s Dabolim Airport (50km); Morjim is easily accessible by road.
- Kitesurfing is conducted in three-hour-long sessions from October to May, depending on wind and water conditions (00-91-9860452162; www.kitesurfinggoa.blogspot.com, yogikiting@gmail.com; Morjim Beach; Discovery Course: ₹ 1,500/ hour, Non-Certified Course: ₹ 15,000, IKO Certified Course: ₹ 22,000).
- If you’re going to sign up for a full course, stay at the **Montego Bay Beach Resort** (00-91-9822150847; www.montegobaygoa.com, info@montegobaygoa.com; from ₹ 4,000 with breakfast).





PHOTOGRAPH BY JEREMIAH CHRISTIAN AND RAO

32 Go wild on a safari

ALL OVER INDIA



Given India's population, it's hard to imagine acres of untouched land left to nature's design, hosting some of our planet's most amazing species.

Yet, thankfully, India is teeming with wildlife sanctuaries, where you can take a safari and spot Bengal tigers, one-horned rhinos, elephants, leopards, gibbons, and a host of unique birds to boot. **Assam's Kaziranga National Park** is ideal for rhino-watching. Assam is home to **Nameri National Park** too, where you can raft down the gentle Jia Bhoroli River and spot over 200 avian species, and is also the entry point for **Arunachal Pradesh's Namdapha National Park**, a dense and relatively unexplored biosphere that's home to red pandas, hornbills and fascinating gibbons. **Rajasthan's Bera Village** is where the rare blue-eyed leopards roam free among arid acacias, or they, along with a host of other big cats, can be spotted in the more lush **Nagarhole National Park** in **Karnataka**. While down south, you can also spot elephants in their natural habitat at **Periyar Tiger Reserve**. And then, there is our national animal – the majestic Bengal tiger. You can spot the big cat in a number of parks, most notably the **Sunderbans of West Bengal**, **Pench**, **Bandhavgarh** and **Kanha** in **Madhya Pradesh**, **Jim Corbett National Park** in **Uttarakhand**, and **Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve** in **Maharashtra**. →

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- **Kaziranga National Park** is best explored on an elephant safari – **Wildgrass** can organise this for you (00-91-3776-262085; www.wildgrasskaziranga@gmail.com). **Kaziranga Airport** (198km) is the closest.
- **Kipepeo** can organise trips into **Nameri National Park** with **Nameri Eco Camp** as your base (00-91-9930002412; www.kipepeo.in, info@kipepeo.in; ₹ 40,000 for a three-night, four-day birding package for two including transport from and to Guwahati, stay, food, birding guide, entrance fees, guide and rafting). The most convenient way to get to **Nameri National Park** is to fly into Guwahati and drive to the park (216km). **Kipepeo** does only one tour to **Namdapha** in the narrow December to February season, so book in advance (₹ 36,000/ person for tour from and to **Dibrugarh** for four to six people).
- **Leopard's Lair Luxury Jungle Resort** organises jeep safaris into **Bera** (00-91-8239365771; www.leopardlairresort.com, info@leopardlairresort.com; from ₹ 3,800, evening leopard safari from ₹ 2,000/ person). The airport closest to **Bera** is in **Udaipur** (152km).
- Book a boat or jeep safari into **Nagarhole** from **Bison Resort** (reservations: 00-91-80-41278708; www.thebisonresort.com, thebisonresorts@gmail.com; from ₹ 6,665/ person with all meals, boat safari: ₹ 1,650/ person, jeep safari: ₹ 1,650/ person).
- **Periyar National Park** has a number of excursions to choose from (see 'Stay afloat'). It's best accessed through **Cochin International Airport** (157km).
- The **Sunderbans National Park** can be explored during September to March by a boat safari. Organise it through **Help Tourism** (00-91-33-24550917; www.helptourism.com, kolkata@helptourism.com; ₹ 31,725/ person for an all-inclusive two-night, three-day package). Fly into **Kolkata** (127km).
- Once in **Madhya Pradesh**, you can explore **Pench** through **Jungle Homes** (00-91-9960736664; www.junglehomepench.com, junglehomepench@gmail.com; ₹ 14,000/ person with stay, meals and two game drives), **Kanha** through **Tuli Tiger Resort** (1800-209-9050; www.tulihotels.com, sales@tuligroup.com; rooms from ₹ 8,500 with all meals, jeep: ₹ 4,500) and **Bandhavgarh** through **Nature Heritage Resort** (00-91-9425331202; www.natureheritageresort.com, natureheritageresort@rediffmail.com; from ₹ 6,500 with all meals, Tala zone: ₹ 5,000/ jeep, Maghdi zone: ₹ 6,000/ jeep).
- For **Jim Corbett National Park**, book a safari through **The Homestead** (00-91-9927082128; www.thehomestead.in, info@thehomestead.in; from ₹ 5,000 with breakfast, safaris from ₹ 3,500/ jeep for five people with forest department fees, guide fees and jeep hire). The closest airport is at **Pantnagar** (75km), however, flights to and from there are quite erratic and it is better to fly into **New Delhi** and drive down (240km).
- Stay and book a jeep safari for **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve** through **Tiger Trails Jungle Lodge** (00-91-712-6541327; www.tigertrails.in, info@tigertrails.in; from ₹ 16,000 with all meals, safari: ₹ 4,500/ jeep). Access it via **Nagpur** (140km).



33 Bump along MAHARASHTRA



"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" is an idiom that **Lavasa** takes very seriously. India's first planned 'smart city' is a centre for upscale businesses and residences, but there are loads of recreational opportunities built in – rappelling, paintballing, archery and jet skiing, to name a few. One of the most fun things you can do here though, is learn to ride a Segway, an eco-friendly personal transport vehicle that makes getting around super-convenient and something out of a Tom Cruise sci-fi flick. Once you've learnt the basics, take a guided tour through the main Daves Town onto the promenade, lined with an eclectic mix

of Italian architecture, cobbled Victorian streets and Venetian canals. If something doesn't quite catch your fancy, no problem... just motor on by! ➔

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

- Ecomantra Nature Adventure's **EcoSegway** organises Segway tours in Lavasa (00-91-8879669907; www.ecosegway.com; Discover Segway basics: ₹ 300; tours from ₹ 1,500).
- Lavasa can be easily reached from Mumbai (186km) and Pune (59km) by road.
- There are plenty of hotels to stay on in; try Fortune Select Daves (00-91-20-67904444; www.fortunehotels.in, lavasa@fortunehotels.in; from ₹ 7,500 with breakfast).



34 Raft down the Brahmaputra ARUNACHAL PRADESH



Despite being home to serene Buddhist monasteries, 26 indigenous tribes and thriving biodiversity, Arunachal Pradesh is perhaps the most virginal of the Indian states, at least as far as tourism is concerned. While there's lots to discover, don't do it the conventional way; spend a week **white-water rafting** in and camping by the Brahmaputra instead! The white-water rapids here are excellent, with names like 'Pulsating Pulsi', 'Broken Oar' and 'Hairy Hari' hinting at the turbulence the Grade 4 to Grade 6 rapids are likely to offer. Still, there are plenty of gentle stretches at which you can kayak and watch shy tribal settlements and wooded hills passing you by. If there's a better way to experience Arunachal Pradesh, we're yet to find it.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

• **Rimo River Expeditions** is a reputed operator that organises a guided 13-day excursion from New Delhi (00-91-124-2806027; www.rimoriverexpeditions.com, info@rimoriverexpeditions.com; ₹ 87,000/ person including accommodation, all transfers, all meals, rafting equipment and professional river guides; airfare is extra). You will fly into and start your experience from Dibrugarh.

Zip over the forest PUNJAB



With 1,800 acres of forest at the foothills of the Shivalik Range and a host of activities such as rappelling, archery and quad biking, **Kikar Lodge** is an amazing place for adventure-seekers. Throw in the prospect of tackling South Asia's longest zipline tour (1,600m over two to 2.5 hours) with highly-trained instructors, and you've got an adrenaline-pumping winner on your hands!

The tour takes you over the green canopy of The Kikar Lodge Private Reserve, skimming the treetops in some instances, providing you with a bird's-eye view of the forest and its inhabitants. And lungfuls of clean air, which you'll lose with a whoop of pure joy.

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

• **Flying Fox** organises the zipline tour over Kikar Lodge (00-91-9810999390; www.flyingfox.asia; ₹ 1,899 adult, ₹ 1,599 child).
• Kikar Lodge is 78km from Chandigarh, so stay overnight to avoid taxing yourself (00-91-9478964971; www.thekikarlodge.com, frontoffice@thekikarlodge.com; from ₹ 6,000 with breakfast).





Rice paddies, such as this one near Red Island Beach in the south-east of Java, help to feed an island that is home to 140 million people



Java

THE PERFECT TRIP

Find a wonderful melange of activities and experiences
on our ideal itinerary that takes you from volcano
to beach and beyond

WORDS OLIVER SMITH | PHOTOGRAPHS PHILIP LEE HARVEY

Your trip mapped out

At the heart of the Indonesian archipelago, the island of Java offers the chance to get as close as you can to steaming volcanoes, follow back country roads to see turtles hatching on the beach, wander the rooms of a royal palace where Javanese dancers perform and watch the dawn break from a legendary temple

At a glance



YOUR DESTINATION

Capital: Jakarta

How far away is it? It's about eight hours to Jakarta.

Languages spoken: Bahasa Indonesia; English is widely spoken only in Jakarta.

YOUR TRIP

Cost: \$\$\$\$

Ideal number of days: 10 days, with a night in Jakarta at the end of your trip

Visa: On arrival

When to go: July – September

Who is it good for?

Experienced travellers who don't mind roughing it out

Highlights: An intro to Javanese culture, volcanic landscapes, turtle-spotting, the magnificent Buddhist temple of Borobudur

KEY PHRASES (PHONETICALLY):

Hello: Hah-lo

Thank you: Terima kasih

Where's the toilet?:

Di mana toilet?

1 Peer gingerly into smoking craters, believed to be the abode of gods amid the volcanic landscapes of Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park.

2 Pick your way through the wilderness of Meru Betiri National Park: one of Java's last remaining chunks of pristine jungle.

3 The seat of powerful sultans and still a bastion of Javanese traditions, the city of Yogyakarta is the place to measure this island's cultural pulse.

4 Climb centuries-old steps to welcome the dawn at the top of Borobudur – the volcanic-stone temple that is Indonesia's greatest ancient monument.



1. A statue of the Hindu god Ganesha with offerings on the rim of Bromo's crater

2. Harian Tokok riding in the shadow of Mount Bromo



1



2

1 BROMO TENGGER SEMERU NATIONAL PARK

Climb through the clouds to see Indonesia's most epic volcanic landscapes


DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 1–3

FROM JAKARTA, IT'S A THREE-HOUR FLIGHT TO SURABAYA, WHICH IS ALSO THREE HOURS AWAY BY ROAD. GARUDA INDONESIA PLIES THE ROUTE (FROM ₹10,200).

A storm is blowing over the Tenggerese Mountains, and the landscape looks a bit like a painting of doomsday. Tungsten-grey clouds scud across a plateau of black sand; the forms of volcanoes appear with each flash of lightning, and the echoes of mighty thunderclaps ping-pong around the craters. Seen in any kind of weather, this is a place to make a visitor feel rather small and ever so slightly vulnerable. But, visited in a storm, it is especially forbidding.

Java is the most volcanic island in the most volcanic nation on Earth. Javanese volcanoes have toppled dynasties of kings and destroyed cities with their eruptions. Even today, their rumbles are read as messages from gods and their explosions have rattled the furniture on Indian Ocean islands some 4,800 kilometres away.

Deadly though they can be, these peaks are at their most eerily beautiful here in Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, a high plateau in eastern Java where a veritable supergroup of volcanoes aligns in a series of sweeping vistas. Dominating the horizon is **Mount Semeru**: the tallest peak on the island and the most regal-looking volcano of all. Almost as dignified is the retired **Mount Batok**, a marvellously symmetrical volcano long since dormant, swathed in mossy greens. And finally there's the volcano that you can smell before you can see, the tantrum-prone **Mount Bromo**, sending plumes of pungent gases spiralling into the air. →



The rutted, green cone of Mount Batok (2,440m) rises next to the fuming Bromo caldera – Batok also has a small Hindu temple at its base

Soon after scaling 250 concrete steps to the rim of Bromo's caldera, walkers are hit by eggy-flavoured sulphurous clouds, setting the eyes watering and the throat wheezing. Fortunately, it's not long before the winds scatter the gases, and the crater is visible in the mist – a great steaming, belching hole that looks like it could be a highway straight to the Earth's molten core. This is not a volcano to be taken lightly: roughly every 10 years, Bromo erupts, volleying ash and rocks over the surrounding area, and shutting down the national park to visitors.

"The eruptions are a blessing," says

Harian Tokok, sitting atop his trusty horse, Manis, and adjusting his poncho in the driving rain. "The volcano makes the soil around here fertile, and the crops grow stronger. I know I am very lucky to work in such a beautiful and holy place."

Harian is one of the Tengger, a Hindu people in predominantly Muslim Java, for whom Mount Bromo takes on a particular spiritual significance. Though he earns his living carrying visitors around the national park on his horse, he occasionally gets uncomfortably close to the volcano. The festival of Kasada sees Hindus climbing down into the crater to present offerings to the god they believe

inhabits Bromo, an event as dangerous as it is spectacular. Participants inch their way down near-vertical slopes of loose scree to throw flowers, vegetables, money and (in moments of profound generosity) live goats into the big, steaming hole.

"I can only climb down three or four metres," says Harian (who prefers to offer flowers and vegetables rather than livestock). "And even then my knees are shaking. But in a way I know the volcano is always protecting me. It is looking after me wherever I go. I am never afraid of it."

With a broad smile, he climbs aboard Manis and canters over the black sand and towards the billowing white clouds. →



Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

With spacious rooms and smart teak interiors, **Jiwa Jawa Resort** is set on a hillside a 10-minute drive from Cemoro Lawang and the national park entrance. Be sure to visit the hotel gallery, which displays photos of the local area (00-62-335-541-193; www.java-banana.com; Jalang Raya Bromo, Wonotoro, Sukapura, Probolinggo Jawa Timur; from ₹ 8,000 with breakfast).

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park** is best accessed via Cemoro Lawang – a three-hour drive south from the city of Surabaya (entry: ₹ 100).



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1. A travelling greengrocer at Red Island Beach
2. Park ranger Suharto Hartono in his office
3. A traditional Javanese bungalow
4. A monitor lizard in Meru Betiri National Park
5. Locals on the beach at Red Island
6. A tea seller at Red Island Beach
7. The bumpy journey into the park
8. Green Bay inside Meru Betiri National Park

Facing page: A recently-hatched baby turtle heads off on its maiden voyage at Sukamade Beach



5



6



7



8

2 MERU BETIRI NATIONAL PARK

*Discover Java's
wilderness coastline –
home to impenetrable
jungle and pristine
beaches where turtles
come to nest*

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 4 – 5

FROM THE NATIONAL PARK'S GATEWAY VILLAGE OF CEMORO LAWANG, DRIVE EASTWARDS FOR 240KM THROUGH FORESTED LANDSCAPES TOWARDS JAVA'S EASTERN COAST. IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO REST FOR THE NIGHT EN ROUTE – THE TOWN OF KALIBARU MAKES FOR A PLEASANT STOP.

It is often said that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. Rarely is hope more necessary than when attempting to reach Meru Betiri National Park. The odyssey starts off deceptively easily, with paved roads stretching south from the town of Genteng, near Banyuwangi, passing twinkling rice paddies and villages of whitewashed cottages with shady verandahs.

Then, bit by bit, the Javan jungle closes in. The road turns increasingly potholed, until at last it becomes one long, continuous pothole. The final and greatest hurdle involves fording a shallow river to reach the park office. At the peak of the rainy season (when water levels are too high for cars), transport comes in the form of an entrepreneur with a bamboo raft, an optimistic grin and wet ankles.

But the difficulties of getting here are worth it. All around is thick impenetrable jungle, a home to myriad species, including Javan hawk-eagles, reticulated pythons and wild boar. It was here that the last footprints of the now-extinct Javan tiger were found – though some whisper the animal still lurks deep in the jungle. It is a place that steadfastly resists human exploration: forest footpaths are soon blocked →





Early morning sun breaks over the Red Island Beach, close to the entrance of Meru Betiri National Park at the eastern end of Java

by mighty tree roots that burst out of the ground, while the mocking calls of macaques sound from the swaying canopy overhead. Meru Betiri is one of the last chunks of wilderness on Java – the most populous island on Earth – and its inaccessibility is what has guarded its natural abundance.

The park's greatest treasure, however, emerges unexpectedly from the jungle just behind the ranger's office: **Sukamade Beach**, a glorious sweep of golden sand bookended by green headlands. It is one of a great many spectacular beaches that stretch along this coastline; nearby is the surfers' haunt of **Red Island Beach**, where colourful bungalows line the shores. Closer still is **Teluk Hijau** (Green Bay) – a sandy cove hemmed in by craggy cliffs. Both of these places see regular visitors. Sukamade, on the other hand, is often rather empty by day, but welcomes another kind of visitor by night.

"Sometimes I recognise the individuals that come here," says Suharto Hartono, swinging idly on his chair in the midday heat. "I am sure they don't recognise me."

For three decades, park ranger Suharto has worked as a midwife-cum-bodyguard to nesting turtles, which come here to dig through the night in cool sand to bury their eggs. Among them are the olive ridley turtle, the hawksbill, the mighty leatherback and – most commonly – the space-hopper-

sized green turtle. All species are vulnerable or endangered; Suharto is charged with catching the many poachers who come here to kidnap the turtles and sell them on until they end up in a soup in China.

Next to his office is the most important part of the conservation effort – the hatchery, where eggs collected from the beach are incubated until tiny turtles pop out. Inside, a handful of freshly-hatched infants are frantically circling their sandy enclosure like wind-up toys. It won't be long before they get their first swimming lesson: visitors can join rangers releasing these turtles at Sukamade, cheering babies on as they instinctively waddle into the foaming waves and salty spray of the Indian Ocean.

"When I see these animals walking into the sea, I am optimistic about their future," says Suharto. "I often think about the great journeys they will make."

Outside the hatchery, Suharto points to a large map showing the turtle highways the infants will soon take – north through the Makassar Strait to the scattered islands of the Philippines, south to the technicolour reefs of Australia, eastwards to the remote coastline of New Guinea. And, one day, some of them will retrace their journeys through those same fathoms and leagues, dodging tiger sharks and trawlers' nets, before returning to Sukamade to give birth to their own young. →

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

The only accommodation here is the no-frills **Mess Pantai** bungalow, a one-minute walk from the hatchery. Rooms are basic, but the park office next-door serves delicious *nasi goreng* at dinner (around ₹ 100), and you'll get to meet the friendly monitor lizard who hangs around waiting for leftovers. Local tour operators can reserve here, but often you'll be able to turn up with no booking (00-62-33-133-5535; in the forest behind Sukamade Beach; room with fan from ₹ 1,000).

FURTHER INFORMATION

• The rangers in Meru Betiri National Park arrange nighttime trips to watch turtles hatching on the beach (www.merubetiri.com; entry: ₹ 715).



1. A gate in the old city of Yogyakarta

2. P Yudo Banskoro – a retainer in the palace

3. A pavilion inside Yogyakarta's palace



3 YOGYAKARTA

Wander the palaces, markets and thoroughfares of the city where Javanese identity is at its proudest

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 6 – 7

VENTURE NORTH-EAST FOR SOME 80KM TO BANYUWANGI. FROM BANYUWANGI-BLIMBINGSARI AIRPORT, GARUDA INDONESIA AND WINGS AIR FLY WITH ONE STOP TO YOGYAKARTA (FROM ₹ 3,600 ONE-WAY).

It's early on a Sunday morning in Yogyakarta, and a small group of teenagers is assembling at the city's 18th-century palace. In a cavernous hall, they start applying colourful make-up and changing into elaborate costumes – beginning the transformation from 21st-century adolescents with iPhones and One Direction hoodies to princes and princesses, demons and demigods from the earliest days of time.

Among them is Lesti Ana – a student and amateur dancer of six years, checking in a gold leaf-ornamented mirror to see if her make-up has smudged. She and her fellow dancers shuffle into the sunshine, and, before a small audience, perform the classical Javanese dance of the *Ramayana* – the ancient Sanskrit epic from India – the stage quickly turning into a mass of tiptoeing legs and twitching arms.

This transformation is a weekly event here in Yogyakarta, the place where Javanese culture is most strongly guarded. Yogyakarta has always been something of a maverick city. The capital for dynasties of powerful sultans in the 17th century, it fiercely defied Dutch colonial rule and still has a special political status in Indonesia – a sort of nation-within-a-nation. A walk reveals that much has

changed since its heyday, but many rhythms of life continue: cycle-rickshaw drivers peddling through monumental gateways; squares where the smell of sizzling satay drifts through the air. It is also a place where traditional Javanese crafts thrive – most notably batik, the art of fabric dying – but silversmiths, puppet makers and basket weavers also ply their craft in and around the city.

The city's cultural headquarters remains the sultan's palace: a jumble of whitewashed courtyards, shady gardens with corridors full of ticking grandfather clocks, ceramic pots and Grecian urns. Still inhabited by a ruling sultan (who can periodically be spotted cycling around Yogyakarta), the palace is administered by his small brigade of elderly volunteer retainers – a sort of Dad's Army of personal protection – all of whom sport turbans and carry large knives (though a few confess to never having unsheathed them). They oversee a busy schedule of performances here: singing, poetry recitals, *gamelan* music (Javanese percussion) and traditional dancing.

Today's performance comes to a close, and the members of the dance group step back into the hall, slowly transforming back into ordinary teenagers.

"It's very tiring to dance," says Lesti, who has just played the lead character of Sita, as she slurps from a cup of tea. "You need a lot of energy, you must practise twice a week

and you learn to be comfortable with the heat under the costume. But we do it because it is important we preserve our traditions in Java. Otherwise we will forget where we come from." →

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

A Yogyakarta landmark dating back to the Dutch Colonial period in 1918, the **Phoenix Hotel** features polished marble floors, ceramic vases and dangling chandeliers, while rooms have good-sized balconies overlooking courtyards (00-62-274-566-617; www.accorhotels.com, info@thephoenixyogya.com; Jl Jenderal Sudirman 9; from ₹ 6,590 with breakfast).

FURTHER INFORMATION

• The entry ticket to **Yogyakarta Palace** includes lunchtime performances in the courtyards (00-62-274-373-321; 8am – 1.30pm Sat – Thur, till 12pm Fri, performances 10am – 12pm; entry: ₹ 60, guided tour by donation).



Lesti Ana prepares for
a Javanese dance performance
in the Yogyakarta Palace



Seen from among the stupas
at the top of Borobudur,
the volcanic peak of Merapi rises
above the morning mists

Facing page:

1. The top of Borobudur
just visible across a rice paddy
2. Suseno working at a bas-relief
3. A horse and cart passing
through the countryside
near Borobudur

4 BOROBUDUR

Scale Indonesia's greatest architectural treasure for panoramic views over the Javanese countryside

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 8 – 9

FROM YOGYAKARTA, DRIVE NORTH-WEST THROUGH RICE PADDY-DOTTED LANDSCAPES FOR 40KM – WITH THE VOLCANO OF MERAPI LOOMING ON THE EASTERN HORIZON – UNTIL YOU REACH THE FOOT OF BOROBUDUR.

Borobudur is the world's biggest Buddhist temple – a religious monument on the scale of Cambodia's Angkor, Burma's Bagan or India's Taj Mahal. According to Buddhist belief, its shape symbolises the order of the cosmos: its uppermost echelons are said to represent the state of nirvana. So it is rather peculiar to think that many people's first experience of this place involves squinting at their own feet.

In the hours before dawn, a trickle of visitors stumbles through the gloom, up the higgledy-piggledy steps to the top of the temple. Occasionally, the lights of torches drift to pick out a detail from the blackness: a growling lion, perhaps, or a bas-relief of a Javanese ship on a stormy sea.

Only when they reach the top does everyone look up, and the performance begins. First, the eastern horizon turns a violet hue, and bats can be seen circling about the dawn sky. Then the silhouettes of stupas emerge, cascading in rows down to the foot of the temple. Lastly, the sun's first rays clear the horizon, and the grey mass of Borobudur is fully revealed: a two-million-stone behemoth dwarfed by the two volcanoes that flank it – Merapi and Sumbing.

Unbelievably, for much of Borobudur's history, it lay abandoned, thanks in part to said volcanoes. Thought to have been built

between 750 and 840 AD by a dynasty of Javanese Buddhist kings, Borobudur was forgotten soon after completion when Islam took hold across Java. Buried by volcanic ash and overgrown with jungle, the temple was only rediscovered in the 19th century, beginning a period of restoration that has continued in fits and starts to the present day, despite being interrupted in the past by episodes of state-sanctioned looting.

The effects of this looting are still apparent. Right across the temple are hundreds of decapitated Buddha statues, their heads now looking out at museum walls from London to Bangkok. But Borobudur's greatest treasures remain intact: its meticulously carved bas-reliefs. Some show scenes from the life of Buddha, others vignettes of ninth-century Javanese life: kings and deities, elephants and courtiers, the subtlety of their expressions undiminished by centuries underground in the company of earthworms.

A half-hour drive north from Borobudur, through a landscape of rice paddies and meandering rivers, takes you to the town of **Magelang**, where the tradition of stone masonry continues.

"The carvers at the temple were skilful," says Suseno, a stone carver of two decades' experience, currently working on a scale replica of a bas-relief at Borobudur. "I wish my copies were as good!"

Though Suseno is a Muslim like most locals, he often visits Borobudur to find inspiration – the structure has become

a symbol of Javanese identity for Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Hindus alike.

"I see the temple with the eyes of a stone carver," he says. "Every time I visit, I will see something new."

Suseno says the rock he works with is volcanic, the same basalt quarried by the builders of Borobudur centuries ago. They too, would have spent months tapping away until figures emerged from the grain. And it is the same basalt formed aeons ago from lava flows, born out of the volcanoes that rumble all over Java. Their summits still loom over the holy stones they once created. 🌿

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

Overlooking the ruins of Borobudur from a magnificent hilltop perch, **Plataran Borobudur Resort & Spa** offers some of the finest accommodation in the area, with traditionally built wooden villas commanding sublime views over tropical gardens. There's also a Colonial-style restaurant and bar, an on-site spa and a small fleet of golf buggies to drive you around the gardens (00-62-293-788-888; www.plataran.com; Dusun Tanjung, Borobudur; from ₹ 8,900).

FURTHER INFORMATION

• Sunrise entry to Borobudur costs ₹ 1,800, entry after 6am costs ₹ 1,300 (00-62-274-496-402).



Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Peak season runs from July to September, with dry, sunny weather. The rainy season means fewer visitors from October to April, but the country remains accessible, with clearer air and long spells of sunshine between the showers. The Buddhist Waisak (Vesak) festival, usually in May, brings spectacle and big crowds to Borobudur.

GETTING THERE

Malaysia Airlines, Jet Airways, Thai Airways, Air India, Singapore Airlines, Garuda Indonesia, Emirates, Cathay Pacific and Etihad Airways fly to Jakarta from Mumbai and New Delhi with one stopover (return fares from ₹ 33,800).

GETTING AROUND

Java is a fairly sizeable place, and internal flights can be helpful if you're short on time. Garuda Indonesia and Indonesia Air Asia are the safest and most reliable domestic operators, connecting Jakarta, Surabaya and Yogyakarta (Jakarta–Yogyakarta from ₹ 10,600 return). Java is one of only two Indonesian islands with a railway network. Trains stop at most large cities, and the network stretches from Banyuwangi in the east to Jakarta and beyond in the west – it's about 7.5 hours by train from Jakarta to Yogyakarta (www.kereta-api.co.id, for advice about booking see www.seat61.com; air-conditioned seat from ₹ 1,500). Long-distance buses are the most popular form of public transport; tickets are cheap, but you'll have to turn up at the bus station to book your seat, and buses rarely depart until all the seats are filled. Car hire is possible, although navigating in Java is not for the faint of heart. It's more common for visitors to hire a vehicle and driver – expect to pay around ₹ 3,000/day (www.avis.co.id).

VISA

Indian citizens traveling to Indonesia can get a visa on arrival as long as they have a return ticket and a passport with six months validity from the date of entry (www.kemlu.go.id; USD 10 [₹ 350] for a seven-day visa, USD 25 [₹ 1,600] for a 30-day visa).

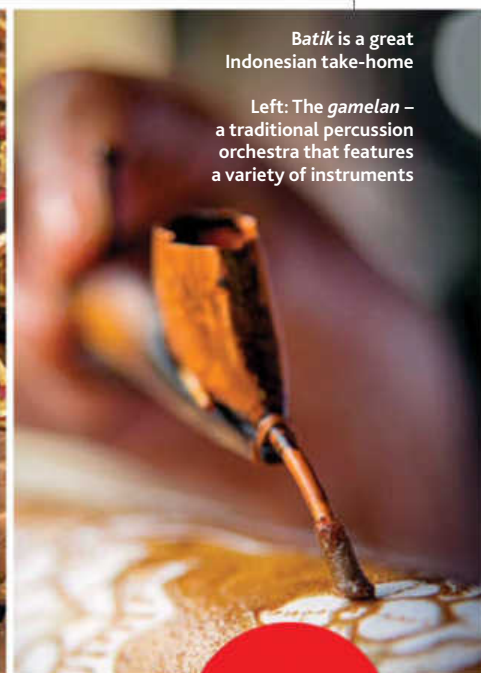
EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Jakarta: www.indianembassyjakarta.com



Batik is a great Indonesian take-home

Left: The gamelan – a traditional percussion orchestra that features a variety of instruments



3

WAYS TO DO JAKARTA

CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!

	Budget	Mid-range	Luxury
STAY	In an ideal location, B&B Tomang is surrounded by supermarkets, malls and food stalls. The rooms are clean and the breakfast is amazing, prepared by the owner's wife (00-62-81-888-6302; www.bnbtomang.wordpress.com ; bnb.tomang@yahoo.com ; Jalan Gelong Baru Timur 6 No 3, Tomang; from ₹ 1,700 with breakfast).	A refuge from the bustling city, the Maritim Guest House offers a unique home-away-from-home experience. It has a large garden and the hosts are extremely helpful and friendly (00-62-21-769-0363; www.maritimgh.com ; resv@maritimgh.com ; Jalan Maritim No 2, Cilandak Barat; from ₹ 4,800 with breakfast).	Kosenda Hotel is a small and trendy boutique hotel. The breakfast is excellent and the staff extremely friendly (00-62-21-3193-6868; www.kosendahotel.com ; info@kosendahotel.com ; Jalan KH Wahid Hasyim No 127; from ₹ 6,200 with breakfast).
EAT	Just a short walk from Jalan Jaksa, Daoen Sirih is an airy, non-touristy food court, serving local dishes and an array of Indonesian noodles. Enjoy dishes like <i>nasi goreng</i> , <i>kambing</i> or even an espresso under the bamboo structure (Jalan Kebon Sirih 41-43; 11am–10pm; meals from ₹ 100).	An old warehouse transformed into a café, Voc Galangal's terrace overlooks a grassy courtyard with a vintage car and buggy. It serves well-priced dishes such as <i>buntut</i> (ox-tail soup) and <i>gado gado</i> , a salad served with a peanut dressing (00-62-667-8501; Jl Kakap I; 9am–5pm; snacks from ₹ 200).	Disguised as a temple, Lara Djonggrang promises delicious, perfectly-presented Indonesian cuisine. The decor is a unique blend of Indonesian artefacts and colossal temple statues, and definitely adds to the experience (00-62-21-315-3252; www.tuguhotels.com ; Jalan Teuku Cik Ditiro 4; 12.30pm–11pm; mains from ₹ 500).
SEE	The area of Lapangan Banteng is the hub at which the best Colonial architecture comes together: a cathedral, mosque, the Ministry of Finance building and Gedung Pancasila are the primary attractions, where visitors can marvel at the old structures or get a tour of the mosque.	The National Museum , built in 1862, houses a magnificent statuary, an ethnology section, an 'origin of mankind in Indonesia' exhibit and more. There are free tours in English, French, Japanese and Korean (00-62-381-1551; www.museumnasional.or.id ; Jalan Merdeka Barat 12; 8am–4pm Tues–Fri; 8am–5pm Sat–Sun; ₹ 25 adult, ₹ 10).	Jin de Yuan is one of the most important Buddhist temples in Jakarta. Dating back to 1755, the unusual structure has a dense interior atmosphere filled with Buddhist drums and statues (Jalan Kemenangan III 13).
Currency	Veg out/ Fancy a curry?		
₹ 1 = IDR (Indonesian Rupiah) 210	Queen's Tandoor is a chain of Indian restaurants across Indonesia that comes very highly recommended for its great quality eats (00-62-21-390-3287; www.queenstandoor.com ; Permata Plaza, Jl MH Thamrin, Kav 57, Jakarta; lunch: 11.30am–3pm, dinner: 6.30pm–11.30pm).		

3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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New
Series

How to... Go camping

Here are a few tips to make your first camping trip comfortable and safe

COMPILED BY FRIYAN DRIVER

How do I get started?

If you grew up reading *Calvin and Hobbes*, then the thought of camping would hold absolutely no attraction for you, conjuring up images of stuffy tents and cold, soggy sandwiches, encounters with overzealous campers and a constant battle with mosquitoes. Don't dismiss camping altogether; it's not all gloom and doom, as Calvin would have you believe.

PICK A PLACE: It's very important to pick a place according to your fitness level. Many protected areas are car-free, which means loads of walking. Weather, too, plays a huge role in how your camping trip will go. Check weather forecasts online once you know where you want to go. Familiarise yourself with the wildlife of the area, especially if you're going to a national park; you don't want to have a bear crashing your marshmallow party, nor do you want to pitch your tent close to a shrub of poison ivy and be left scratching for the rest of your trip!

HOW TO PACK: Pick a bag based on how long your trip is, and only carry what you need. Backpacks will be your best bet – lugging a 40kg suitcase over rough terrain is no fun! And check it before you leave – a backpack that gives way on a trip can be a nightmare. Do *not* overpack; leave those curling irons and that PSP at home, and focus instead on the weather. Wearing your bulkiest clothes like jackets while you travel will free up more space, and packing in reverse order – with what you will need first on top – saves time. Lastly, this is when you should take all those quick-dry clothes (swimsuits, tracksuits, etc).

SETTING UP: Always aim to reach the campsite before sundown. Once you get there, enquire about the general direction of the wind and sun, and choose a patch of level ground on which to pitch your tent. Keep the location of the loo in mind – you want it to be not too close, but not too far, either. Avoid being too close to cliffsides and water bodies, especially if you're with kids. Organise your campsite from the get-go; everything should have its place. For example, have a designated area to keep food, trash and the like. If you're pitching your tent under a tree, make sure there are no dead branches lurking overhead.

WHAT ABOUT FOOD? Most campsites have an onsite restaurant or café that serves delicious local food. You can also rent a fire pit if the site has one, and have yourself a barbeque.

International campsites usually have a grocery store from where you can shop for edibles like bread, eggs, water and chocolates. Carrying granola bars always helps! →

Responsible camping

The cardinal rule of camping: put all that junk back into your trunk! It's imperative to leave the campsite as you found it, and to properly dispose of all the trash you have accumulated. If you can't do that at the campsite, take it with you. Remember to carry your own trash bags! Put out fires before you leave. Do not feed or touch the animals you encounter.

Where should I go?



CALA LLEVADO, COSTA BRAVA, SPAIN

THE CAMPSITE: A sea-view bedroom doesn't always have to always cost you an arm and a leg. Cala Llevado, with direct access to four beaches, spoils you with exactly that. Not a beach person? The campsite also has shaded pitch sites in the surrounding forests.

WHY GO HERE: This one's great for families, with a host of activities to keep everyone busy, from craft workshops and coastal hiking trails to even a nudist beach.

WHEN TO GO: The campsite is open for business from April 1 to September 30. May and September are good times to visit, with pleasant weather minus the crowds.

GETTING THERE: The Costa Brava is a two-hour drive from Barcelona. Buses ply daily from Barcelona Airport to Tossa Station.

● 00-34-972-340-314; www.calallevado.com;

Tossa de Mar, Costa Brava; tent rental: ₹ 1,050/ night, pitch rental: ₹ 400/ person



CHANDRATAAL LAKE, SPITI, HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

THE CAMPSITE: You will be forgiven for not wanting to sleep in your tent for this one. You might be forgiven for not sleeping at all. At an altitude of 4,300 metres, few campsites offer views as dramatic as this. Teal blue skies greet you as you trek in the day, while the Milky Way leads you through the night.

WHY GO HERE: Spiti's Chandra Taal Lake is only accessible for three to four months a year, adding to its mythic elusiveness. The area is home to unique wildlife; if you're lucky, you might be able to spot a Himalayan wolf, Siberian ibex or even a shy snow leopard slinking by. Shepherds from neighbouring villages bring their sheep to graze at the pastures, and will be happy to make a brief halt for some *chai* and friendly banter.

WHEN TO GO: End June to end September

GETTING THERE: Drive down from New Delhi to Manali (554km). Halt for the night at Manali. In the morning, drive to Batal (116km); the lake is a 16km drive from there.

● 00-91-9418200183; www.travelspiti.com, info@

travelspiti.com; ₹ 1,850/ person with a tent and breakfast

KONASHIDAIRA CAMPING RETREAT, KAMIKOCHI, JAPAN

THE CAMPSITE: Pitch your tent a few feet from the Azusa River on a flat-lying area amid pine and crabapple trees. The restaurant dishes out grub made with ingredients foraged from the forest. The campsite offers free B&B (baths and beer) to those who complete a scavenger hunt that takes you to the highlights of the area.

WHY GO HERE: Cocooned in Chubu Sangaku National Park, Kamikochi is one of Japan's best-kept secrets. The terrain is flat and requires

no hiking experience. The area's wildlife is rather tame – mostly monkeys, birds and very rarely, bears.

WHEN TO GO: Kamikochi's peak season is from mid-May to end-July, but the autumn foliage puts on a show in mid-October, too.

GETTING THERE: Take a train from Tokyo to Matsumoto, and from there to Shin Shimashima. Then take a bus to Kamikochi Bus Terminal.

Buy a Japan Rail Pass

(www.japanrailpass.net).

● 00-81-263-95-2321;

www.nihonalspskankou.com;

10-min walk from Kamikochi

Bus Terminal; pitch rental:

₹ 400/ adult, ₹ 250/ child

up to the age of 12, four-person

tent: ₹ 4,000/ night

Camping hacks

- Use Tic-Tac boxes for basic condiments
- To keep kids busy, send them on a scavenger hunt. Set a perimeter so that you can keep an eye on them.
- A shoe organiser doubles up as a campsite organiser.
- Yoga mats can double up as floor mats in a pinch.
- Battery-operated tea lights are a safe light source.





BADAMI, KARNATAKA, INDIA

THE CAMPSITE: Imagine a beautiful ravine guarded by rugged cliffs. Imagine ancient temples carved out of its underbelly. Imagine exploring these rugged hills, learning how to rock-climb, discovering caves or just watching the stars twinkle above. This is camping in Badami. By day, walk to the village market and bring back fresh produce to barbecue at your campsite before you head out to ogle at the architectural wonders here.

WHY GO HERE: Badami remains unexplored thanks to its more famous cousin, Hampi, and is one of the few places in India where culture and adventure go hand in hand.

WHEN TO GO: Between September and February.

GETTING THERE: Fly to Hubli and take a taxi to Badami (105km) or drive down from Bangalore – it's a lovely drive!

● 00-91-9844035741; climberpraveen@gmail.com; from ₹ 9,000 with accommodation, food and activities



CORY TREPANIER'S TIPS ON WHAT TO CARRY:

The Canadian artist and filmmaker is best known for his wonderful works painted in the Canadian wilderness

- Lots of dehydrated food, lovingly prepared by my wife Janet
- **Painting gear:** Half box French easel, oil paints, thinner, brushes...
- **Camping gear:** Tents, packs, hiking poles (a must: they help the knees when carrying heavy loads)
- **Emergency gear:** Satellite phone, wilderness first-aid kit (and knowledge of how to use it), way to start a fire
- **Filmmaking gear:** Everything! Laptop, hard drives to back up photos and footage
- **Solar power:** Portable solar panels, and batteries to keep all the tech working
- Sunglasses, bug spray, etc and way too many other things in case anything breaks!

MORE ON CORY TREPANIER
ON OUR ANYTHING TO DECLARE PAGES

ECO HABITAT, COORG, KARNATAKA, INDIA

THE CAMPSITE: This homestay, run by Soma 'Som' Shekhar, offers a tonne of adventure activities. The coolest has to be the trek up a mountain in the Western Ghats. You go deep into the jungle, with one stop at 'base camp'. From here, the terrain only gets harder.

Your efforts are rewarded with a night under the stars. Wildlife abounds here, but don't worry, Som sends a team to the campsite the day before to set up camp and light torches to announce your presence to the animals.

WHY GO HERE: The thick, untamed forests are just perfect for a taste of the raw; well, almost.

WHEN TO GO: November to April

GETTING THERE: Bangalore is 267km away

● 00-91-8276-279283; www.ecohabitat.in; Sri Balaji Farm, Chikbetta Village, Guddehosur Post, Kushalnagar; from ₹ 2,500/ person with breakfast



BUTTERFLY VALLEY, ÖLÜDENİZ, TURKEY

THE CAMPSITE: This campsite attracts a wide range of people, from blotchy pensioners and broke hippies to the happy day-trippers island-hopping in the area. Campers meditate on the beach while others kick up sand practising *Bharatnatyam* moves – the campsite organises classes! – which would be amusing to watch, if nothing else.

It also has a dive school if you want to explore the area's rich marine life.

WHY GO HERE: A speck on Turkey's Lycian Way, this protected area attracts a hundred species of butterflies, including the endemic Jersey tiger butterfly. An easy walk from the beach takes you to the valley's waterfall that descends from the canyon wall.

WHEN TO GO: July and August can get very hot, especially in a tent. May and September have pleasant, balmy weather.

GETTING THERE: Fly into Fethiye from Istanbul, then take a shuttle bus to Ölüdeniz (www.shuttledirect.com; ₹ 440/ person). Access to Butterfly Valley is via a 20-minute boat ride from Ölüdeniz Beach.

● 00-90-539-458-732; www.thebutterflyvalley.blogspot.in; ₹ 1,400/ person with tent rental, breakfast and dinner

What will I need?

- Tent
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad/ inflatable mattress

- Waterproof tarp to pitch your tent on
- Head torch/ lamp
- Insect repellent depending on where you're going
- Power banks

- Microfibre towel
- Extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Rope
- Multi-purpose knife/ pocket knife
- Loads of toilet paper
- A map of the area and a compass
- Matches
- Peanut butter

- The Google Sky Maps app is brilliant – you hold it up against the sky, and it tells you what constellation/ star/ planet you're looking at, perfect for camping because you're sure to see a sky full of stars (and you can use it offline, too!).

ENTER THE DRAGON

Seoul is fascinating at the best of times, and takes on a wholly different character during the Lotus Lantern Festival, held every year around the Buddha's birthday



PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO
WORDS ALISHA WADIA

SOUTH Korea sure knows how to throw a birthday party. Every year, the bite-sized futuristic nation celebrates the Buddha's birthday with the very dazzling (literally), very traditional Lotus Lantern Festival in Seoul. And they've been doing it for a while. Yeung Dong Hoe, or 'lighting the lantern', dates back to the 10th century Silla Kingdom, and is a ritual that honours the Buddha from the times of the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. In Buddhism, lanterns are a symbol of wisdom, lighting up the dark corners of the world, and the lotus, its most common motif, stands for purity. Today, the bash kicks off with the lighting of hundreds of thousands of lotus lanterns, ending in a massive parade of performers and floats and lanterns of all shapes and sizes and a party that everyone attends, even though only a quarter of Koreans are Buddhists. Jogye monks, the country's largest Buddhist sect, traditionally open the revelries, with the parade starting at Dongdaemun and ending at the Jogyesa Temple. The festival this year was particularly special, marking the 60th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, and also featured lanterns to remember the victims of the Nepal earthquake by.

Lonely Planet Magazine India's Senior Travel Researcher Alisha Wadia, and Photo Editor Jeremiah Christanand Rao, were in South Korea for this year's Lotus Lantern Festival.





They may look menacing, but Korean dragons have a pretty good reputation. Legendary in local mythology, they're actually seen as kind and understanding water dwellers, harbingers of rain and warders-off of evil spirits. Anyone else beginning to wonder if Toothless had a Korean mum or dad? →

1. Come early and grab a front-row seat, because, while the big floats are wicked cool, they aren't a patch on the performers, and won't elicit half the hoots, toots and gasps as the whirling, twirling dancers do. Traditional folk dancers kick off the parade, praying for a good harvest with some jaw-droppingly good acrobatics. Now which god wouldn't be impressed by that?



2. It takes all sorts of traditional folk dancers to start a parade, even ones with giant, eye-catching pom-pom heads. That distinctive headgear is actually *jihva*, paper flowers made of *hanji*, exquisite Korean handmade paper



3. Canopies don't get prettier than this, do they? A ceiling of richly-hued lanterns covers every inch of the Jogyesa Temple, the nerve centre of the festival, where you can be a Buddhist for a day, taste temple food, do a bit of art and craft to make a carry-home lotus lantern and bathe an adorably chubby baby Buddha. But get this, every single row of lanterns is meticulously hung by colour. I think I'm a little bit in love with South Korea →



1. Don't be surprised if you see an MJ lookalike lurking about the floats, reaching for the iconic crotch grab. The smooth criminal may be gone, but that superstar spirit will never beat it! Especially in a country that loves pop music as much as *kimchi*



2. If the parade gets you too excited, 'bee' calm and dig into some honeycomb ice cream – creamy vanilla topped with gooey beeswax, dusted with green tea powder. It's all the rage in South Korea right now, and you'll find it at street-side stalls across Seoul. 'Beeware': the sugar will give you a killer buzz

3. As the evening steadily melts into night, the monster-sized (and shaped) illuminated animal floats begin to look gorgeous, and you can only begin to appreciate the painstaking task of creating them from scratch. What's more amazing is that even the big ones like this are made from *hanji* →





I've got the whole world – on my head... Some of the floats and lanterns might make no sense to you, particularly if you aren't Korean, but the detail and skill that goes into constructing each one is enough to leave you in awe 🌟

Make it Happen

Essentials

📅 BEST TIME TO VISIT

The Lotus Lantern Festival is celebrated every year a few weeks before the Buddha's birthday, in April or May, depending on the lunar calendar. Check the official website for 2016 dates (www.llf.or.kr/eng/index.asp).

📍 GETTING THERE

Air India and Asiana Airlines fly directly to Seoul's Incheon International Airport, while Korean Air flies non-stop from Mumbai thrice a week (www.koreanair.com). Malaysia Airlines, China Eastern and Cathay Pacific fly with stopovers (return fares from ₹ 37,000).

🚇 GETTING AROUND

Seoul has a brilliant public transport system, and once you get a hang of the names, the metro system's fairly easy to use. Single journey tickets start at ₹ 70; with a smart pass or combination tickets, prices get cheaper (www.smrt.co.kr; T-Money pass from ₹ 150, Seoul City Pass: ₹ 850/ one-day pass).

🛂 VISA

Apply for a single-entry tourist visa that takes four to five working days and costs ₹ 2,400. Get more info at www.ind.mofa.go.kr/english. Applicants in New Delhi and Kolkata can apply through VFS (www.vfsglobal.com/korea/india).

📧 EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, South Korea: www.indembassy.or.kr

CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!

💰 CURRENCY

1 South Korean won (KRW) = ₹ 17.8

📖 FURTHER READING

The official website for the Korea Tourism Organisation and Visit Seoul is useful and packed with information (www.visitseoul.net).

🍲 VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

We'll be honest, Seoul isn't easy for vegetarians, but there are a surprising number of Indian restaurants to be found. Get your *desi* fix at Ganga, famous for its tandoori dishes that will hit the spot. You'll almost miss the neat hole it burns in your pocket (00-82-2-2055-3610; www.ganga.co.kr/en; B 1, Samsung Bldg, 1320-10, Seocho-dong, Gangnam; 11.30pm – 3pm, 5.30pm – 10pm; set meals from ₹ 1,685).

🏠 STAY & EAT

The Holiday Inn Express Euljiro's location bang opposite the metro station in the city centre is hard to beat, with shiny-clean if rather compact rooms (00-82-2-6240-5000; www.ihg.com; 61, Supyo-ro, Jung-gu; from ₹ 5,615).

Sample the varied and the weird when it comes to food in Seoul. Don't leave without trying the crispy, fried-on-the-spot mung bean pancakes in Gwanjang Market, and that Korean staple, pork or beef barbecue. Nearly every second restaurant has DIY barbecue tables at which you can spend half the night grilling and stuffing your face with slivers of tender meat bursting with flavour.

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MINI GUIDE AUGUST 2015

Philadelphia, The USA

Although outshone by New York City 155km away, Philadelphia is a truer representative of what East Coast city living is like, with its burgeoning food, music and art scenes, neighbourhoods and parks, each with a distinct personality

WHY GO?

For a peek into what colonial American cities once looked like.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

One of America's most historic cities, Philly is best experienced on foot. Explore the city by going on a walking tour. Be sure to admire the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the American Constitution and Declaration of Independence were signed. Or soak up some art at one of the city's many museums. After digesting all this, go find yourself a classic Philly cheesesteak sandwich.



Left: The Philadelphia Museum of Art

Right: The Liberty Bell was recast in 1753, after the original cracked

Best for history

INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ①

Known as the birthplace of American democracy, the Independence National Historical Park welcomes over 3.5 million visitors every year. The park's most-visited attraction is the 2,080-pound Liberty Bell (00-1-215-965-2305; 1, North Independence Mall West; www.nps.gov/inde; 9am – 5pm, till 7pm summer; Liberty Bell: entry free, Independence Hall: free timed entry tickets available onsite, reserved tickets: ₹95 Mar – Dec).



The Declaration of Independence was signed at Independence Hall

FRANKLIN FOOTSTEPS WALKING TOUR ②

This 75-minute walking tour retraces the life of Benjamin Franklin during the founding of America. Apart from a visit to his home, highlights include Independence Hall, Christ Church, the Betsy Ross House, and the Christ Church Burial Ground (00-1-215-965-2311; www.phlvisitorcenter.com/tour/franklin-footsteps-walking-tour; 11am, 1pm, 3pm; ₹1,200 adult, ₹765 child).

EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY ③

Crumbling cellblocks and empty guard towers greet you at the Eastern State Penitentiary, once the most renowned (and expensive) prison in the world. Its cells have held some of America's most notorious masterminds, including Al Capone and bank robber "Slick Willie" Sutton. Opt for an audio tour, or view some of the art and history exhibits on display (00-1-215-236-3300; www.easternstate.org; 2027, Fairmount Ave; 10am – 5pm; ₹900 adult, ₹635 child).

Best for art

THE BIRTHPLACE OF GRAFFITI TOUR ④

Not many know that graffiti originated in Philadelphia in the '60s, with the movement eventually spreading to the rest of America and Europe. Explore the city's underground art scene with this tour (00-1-201-397-9138; www.graffittours.com/philadelphia-private-tours; tours start at Walnut and South 12th St; 90-minute private tour: ₹9,550 [up to four people] ₹15,900 [5 to 10 people]).



The graffiti movement originated in Philadelphia in the 1960s

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART ⑤

One of the largest and most important museums in the USA, it houses collections ranging from Asian art to Renaissance masterpieces, as well as modern pieces by Picasso, Duchamp and Matisse (00-1-215-763-8100; 2600, Benjamin Franklin Parkway; www.philamuseum.org; 10am – 5pm Tues, Thur, Sat & Sun, till 8.45pm Wed & Fri; ₹1,275 adult, ₹900 child).

FABRIC WORKSHOP & MUSEUM ⑥

The only museum of its kind in the world, the Fabric Workshop was founded in 1977. It began as a space for artists and students, but, today, it hosts over 5,600 works by around 500 artists from diverse backgrounds, like sculpture, installation, painting, ceramics and architecture (00-1-215-561-8888; 1214, Arch St; www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org; 10am – 6pm Mon – Fri, 12pm – 5pm Sat – Sun; free).

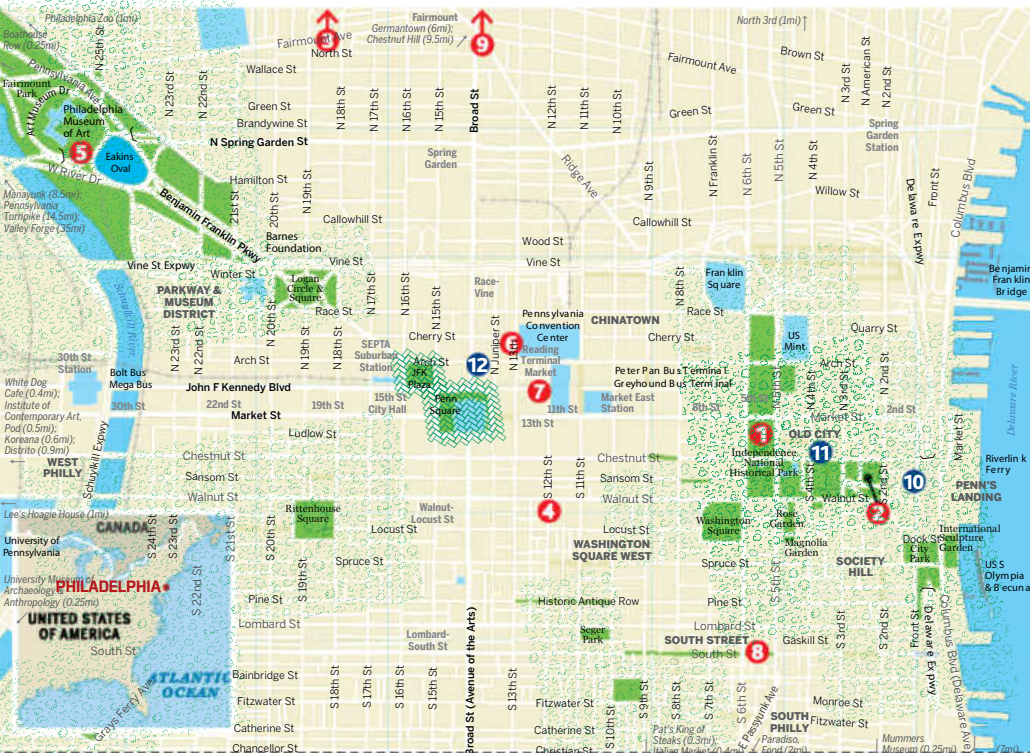
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Philadelphia, The USA

Getting around

See Eat & drink Sleep



Essentials

GETTING THERE

Lufthansa, Air France, United Airlines, British Airways and Air India fly to Philadelphia with one, or at the most two, stopovers from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹75,000).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Philadelphia is during spring (Mar–May), when the city has recovered from the cold winter. Autumn (Sept–Oct) is also a good time to go. While summer (Jun–Aug) is peak season, the large crowds tend to drive hotel rates up.

Eat

READING TERMINAL MARKET 7

Established in 1892, this is the oldest continuously operating farmers' market in the USA. Sample Asian, Pennsylvania Dutch or Middle Eastern fare – almost every cuisine is on offer. Try the roast pork and beef sandwich at DiNic's, or watch Amish bakers twist and bake soft pretzels right in front of your eyes (00-1-215-922-2317; 12th and Arch St; 8am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–5pm Sun).

JIM'S STEAKS SOUTH STREET 8

You can't leave town without trying a classic Philly cheesesteak, and Jim's creates one of its best renditions. Don't let the long lines discourage you – this place serves up some of the finest cheesesteaks and hoagies around (00-1-215-928-1911; www.jimssouthstreet.com; 400, South St; 10am–1am Mon–Thur, 10am–3am Fri–Sat, 11am–1am Sun; from ₹575).

TROLLEY CAR DINER 9

Slip into a booth and get comfy – it's always the 1950s in here. This old-fashioned diner is set up



Jim's Steaks South Street makes a good classic Philly cheesesteak

in an Art Deco space, and on the menu are classic comfort foods like fried shrimp and club sandwiches (00-1-215-753-1500; www.trolleycardiner.com; 7619, Germantown Ave; 7am–9pm Mon–Thur, 7am–10pm Fri–Sat, 8am–9pm Sun; mains from ₹570).

Visa

Apply for a US 'B-1/ B-2' tourist/ business visa by filling out the DS-160 form online. Visa processing time is usually three working days (www.ustravel docs.com; ₹10,560).

Sleep

Situated within walking distance of many historic sites, **The Thomas Bond House Bed & Breakfast 10** exudes colonial charm. Stay in rooms carefully restored to the 18th-century Federal Period (00-1-215-923-8523; www.thomasbondhousebandb.com; info@thomasbondhousebandb.com; Independence National Historic Park, 129, South 2nd St; from ₹8,900 with breakfast).

Hotel Monaco 11 features historically inspired rooms with bold modern elements. The restored four-star boutique hotel also comes with a beautiful rooftop lounge (00-1-215-925-2111; www.monaco-philadelphia.com; 433, Chestnut St; from ₹11,000).

A boutique hotel, **Le Meridien Philadelphia 12** is located in a 10-storeyed historic building with a 75-foot central courtyard. It features modern guest rooms with bold black-and-white decor, and has a 24-hour gym (00-1-215-422-8200; www.lemeridienphiladelphia.com; reservations@lemeridienphiladelphia.com; 1421, Arch St;



The charming parlour at Thomas Bond House Bed & Breakfast

Fancy a curry?

Tashan serves an array of Indian dishes, from classics such as dal roti to unusual items like salmon tikka. Mains feature biryani, butter chicken and lamb vindaloo, among other staples (00-1-267-687-2170; www.mytashan.com; 777, S Broad St; lunch: 11.30am–2pm, dinner: 5pm onwards; mains from ₹650).

Embassy Alert

Consulate General of India, New York: www.indiacgny.org

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

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MINI GUIDE AUGUST 2015

Crowd-free Algarve, Portugal

The southernmost region of Portugal is known for its beaches and sandy islands, but there's much more to see – enchanting hillsides, historic towns, rich flora and fauna, and walking trails

WHY GO?

To experience a more authentic Algarve, beyond the shiny sphere of cruise ships and golf courses.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Thanks to centuries of Moorish occupation and its colourful maritime history, the Algarve region is a distinctive cultural destination known for North African-inspired architecture, old-fashioned farms, lively religious festivals, and time-honoured seafood recipes. Explore the quiet beaches or go walking through the mountains, or breathe in the history that Olhão and the ruins of Milreu exude.

Left: A lagoon in the Parque Natural da Ria Formosa

Right: The Galo de Barcelos (Rooster of Barcelos) is one of the most common emblems of Portugal



Coastal highlights

CABO DE SÃO VICENTE ①

The southwesternmost point in Europe, Cape St Vincent was a revered place even in the time of the Phoenicians. At sunset, you can almost hear the sea hissing as the sun hits it. At the end of the cape is a wind-whipped red lighthouse and the excellent Museu dos Faróis (10am – 5pm Oct – Mar, to 6pm Tues – Sun Apr – Sept; €110), which does a great job in showcasing the importance of Sagres in Portugal's maritime navigation history.



Cabo de São Vicente, named after the patron saint of Lisbon

PARQUE NATURAL DA RIA FORMOSA ②

This natural park is mostly a lagoon system stretching for 60km along the Algarve coastline. It encloses a vast area of *sapal* (marsh), *salinas* (salt pans), creeks and dune islands. The marshes are important for migrating and nesting birds. You can see many wetland birds here, along with ducks, shorebirds, gulls and terns. This is the nesting place of the little tern and the rare purple gallinule.

ILHA DA BARRETA ③

While Faro's beach is crammed in July and August, you can get a ferry out to Praia de Farol (on Ilha da Culatra) and Ilha da Barreta (aka Ilha Deserta), a long and narrow strip of sand just off the mainland. There is little to do here besides some serious relaxation. But this is where you'll find O Estaminé, an environment-friendly restaurant that serves a great selection of local fish (00-351-917-811-856; www.ilha-deserta.com; 11am – 5.30pm winter, 10.30am – 7pm summer).

Interior pursuits

WALKING THE VIA ALGARVIANA ④

Encompassing some of the most beautiful scenery in the Algarve, the 300km Via Algarviana walking trail crosses the breadth of Portugal, from Alcoutim to Cabo de São Vicente, taking in the wooded hillsides of the Serras do Caldeirão and Monchique. It takes about 14 days to walk the entire trail (www.viaalgarviana.org).



A Bonelli's eagle finds a rocky perch in the Serra do Caldeirão

CALHAS DE MONCHIQUE SPA ⑤

Hit this spa hamlet after hiking the surrounding hills of the Serra de Monchique. The Romans loved its 32°C alkaline waters, said to be good for rheumatism, and respiratory and digestive ailments. Admission to the Calhas de Monchique spa includes access to the sauna, steam bath, gym and pool (00-351-282-910-910; www.monchiquetermas.com; Monchique; 10am – 6pm Mon – Thur, 9am – 7pm Fri – Sun; entry: €1,400, ₹1,050 for hotel guests).

SERRA DO CALDEIRÃO ⑥

This beautiful protected area of undulating hills, cork trees and harsh scrubland is renowned for its rich birdlife. Go hiking here – try the posted 5km-circuit walk up the limestone peak, the Rocha da Pena, which has abundant flora and fauna. Orchids, narcissi and native cistus cover the slopes, where red foxes and Egyptian mongooses are common. If you're lucky, you might also spot eagle owls, Bonelli's eagles and buzzards.

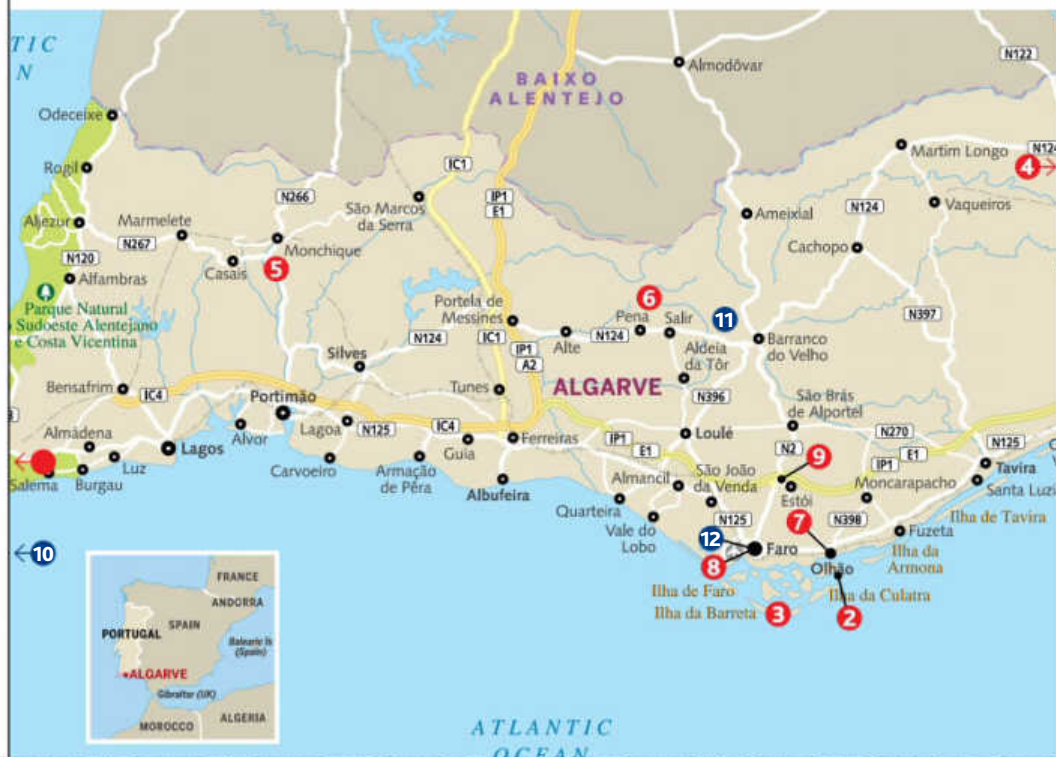
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Crowd-free Algarve, Portugal

Getting around

See Eat & drink Sleep



Essentials

GETTING THERE

Lufthansa, British Airways, KLM Royal Dutch and Swiss fly to Faro International Airport from Mumbai and Delhi, with at least two layovers (*return fares from ₹85,000*). Buses 14 and 16 run from the airport to the city centre (20 minutes; ₹150). You can also hire a car at Faro Airport (www.hertz.com; ₹3,700/day).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Spring (Mar–May) and early autumn (Sept–Oct) are the best times to be in Algarve, when the crowds are thinner and the weather pleasant.

Historic towns & sites

OLHÃO 7

Pronounced *ol-yowng*, Olhão is the Algarve's biggest fishing port, with an active waterfront and pretty lanes in its old quarters. The pretty Moorish-influenced neighbourhoods and strong North African feel make Olhão a pleasant place to wander about in. The seafood restaurants here serve great *cataplanas* (seafood stew) and *xerém* (similar to polenta).



Faro's Arco da Vila was built on an original Moorish gateway

CIDADE VELHA FARO 8

Set within medieval walls, Faro's Cidade Velha has cobbled streets and squares reconstructed in a mix of styles following battering by the British, then by earthquakes. Enter through the Arco da Vila, then head down the orange tree-lined Largo da Sé, with the *câmara municipal* (town hall) on the left, the Paço Episcopal (Bishop's Palace) on the right, and the sé (cathedral) in front of you.

MILREU RUINS 9

Set in a beautiful countryside, the ruins of this grand Roman villa provide a rare glimpse into Roman

life. See the water sanctuary, a temple devoted to the cult of water, and the 15th-century rural house, which still stands within the abandoned site (*Milreu & Estói*; 10.30am–1pm and 2pm–6.30pm May–Sept, 9.30am–1pm and 2pm–5pm Oct–Apr; entry: ₹140 adult, ₹130 for those under 25).

Visa

A Schengen short-stay visa to Portugal costs ₹4,215 and takes up to two weeks to process (www.pt.vfsglobal.co.in).

Sleep

The white and aquamarine decor of **Mareta View 10** in Sagres gives it a seaside feel. It has wonderful sea views, excellent breakfasts and is located in the centre of Sagres Village (00-351 282-620-000; www.maretaview.com, reservations@sagresholidays.com; Sagres; from ₹9,200 [Aug], ₹3,700 [usual rate]).

The setting of **Quinta do Coração 11**, a converted farmhouse in Carrasqueiro, on the Via Algarviana, is lovely – on a hill, surrounded by cork and eucalyptus trees, and olive groves. The rooms here are charmingly rustic (00-351-289-489-959; www.algarveparadise.com, info@algarveparadise.com; Carrasqueiro, Salir; from ₹3,900 with breakfast).

A modern cubist block, **Hotel Faro 12** has 90 sleek rooms with big beds and marble bathrooms. The bar-restaurant with terrace is great for a cocktail (00-351-289-830-830; www.hotelfaro.pt, reservas@hotelfaro.pt; Praça D Francisco Gomes, Faro; from ₹8,900 with breakfast).



A hot tub overlooking the Atlantic Ocean at Mareta View

Fancy a curry?

Clay Oven specialises in Indian tandoori cuisine, serving up *naans* and *kulchas* with a variety of gravies. It even accepts off-menu requests (00-351-289-586-868; Avenida Dos Descobrimentos, Edif Mira Vila, R/C, Bloco B, Albufeira; 6pm–11.30pm)

Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Lisbon:
www.indembassy-lisbon.org

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

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WIN

Win a Romantic Getaway for Two in Hong Kong

WORTH
₹2 LAKH



Tigerair offers Indian travellers flights from five Indian destinations – Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli



THE PRIZE

- Two return Economy Class tickets to Hong Kong via Singapore on Tigerair
- A five-day/ four-night stay (with complimentary breakfast on two days) at Park Hotel Hong Kong

HOW TO ENTER

To participate in this contest, fill your details into the entry form and send it to: *Lonely Planet Magazine India* (August 2015), Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr DN Road, Mumbai – 400001. Competition closes at midnight on August 31, 2015. Terms and conditions apply.

COMPETITION ENTRY FORM

For a chance to win this fantastic prize, simply fill in your details and post this form to: *Lonely Planet Magazine India* (August 2015), Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr DN Road, Mumbai – 400001. Competition closes on August 31, 2015. Terms and conditions apply.

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Worldwide Media Pvt. Ltd, publisher of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, may contact you with details of its products and services or to undertake research. If you prefer not to receive such information by post or phone, please tick this box ☐. Please include your email address if you prefer to receive such information by email. We may occasionally pass your details on to carefully selected companies whose products and services we feel may be of interest to you. If you prefer not to receive such information by post or phone, please tick this box ☐.

Terms and Conditions for the lucky draw:

1. The contest is organized by Tigerair and Park Hotel Hong Kong and World Wide Media Private Ltd (WWM) and is binding on all participants in this contest and all applications for participants
2. Only one entry permitted per person, entries made in bulk or by third parties are prohibited. WWM/Tigerair/Park Hotel Hong Kong reserves the right to cancel any duplicate entries and debar all such entries from the contest at its own discretion
3. Entries received after the closing dates shall not be entertained
4. The results declared by WWM/Tigerair/ Park Hotel Hong Kong will be final and no further queries or complaints or questions will be entertained and WWM/Tigerair/ Park Hotel Hong Kong are further not obliged to respond to the same

5. There is no cash alternative and the prize is non-transferable

6. The winner of the contest shall manage/ arrange for the travel documents including the visa, passport, transfers, etc. and ensure that they meet all foreign entry requirements and have the appropriate medical insurance

7. WWM/Tigerair/Park Hotel Hong Kong are not responsible for difference or variance or deficiency in the service (including the hotel stay) and will not have any obligation to respond to any of the complaints

8. WWM/Tigerair/ Park Hotel Hong Kong reserve the right to change/ modify the terms and conditions of this offer or to withdraw this offer at any point in time if circumstances arise beyond our control

9. The winner of the contest shall pay and be responsible for the income tax and other statutory taxes before claiming the gift coupon/voucher

10. The winner of the contest shall give proof of payment of income tax and other statutory taxes before claiming the gift coupon/voucher

11. Tigerair will provide air tickets – Base fare only. Applicable taxes and other charges need to be paid by the winner

12. Air tickets are valid on Tigerair flights with airline code TR only and are not applicable on code share partners

13. WWM/Tigerair are not responsible for any delay that occurs for reasons outside their control

14. Once the reservations are made and the flight ticket(s) issued, changes are permitted subject to availability and the applicable date change penalty and difference in fares are applicable.

15. The contest is open until midnight on August 31, 2015

16. The winner will be selected on September 10, 2015. The winner will be notified via the email

address provided at the time of submission

17. Travel must be completed by November 31, 2015. Any changes in the Tigerair flight schedules, routes and seasonality, as well as seat availability, affects the choice of departure date

18. In case of a 'no-show', penalty would be applied as per the fare rules

19. Flight confirmation is subject to availability at the time of booking

20. Blackout period and other restrictions may apply

21. The prize tickets cover travel from Tigerair gateway airports in India only. The winner will have to pay all other travel expenses and any other applicable service charges, surcharges, airport or security taxes or fees, passenger facility charges or fees, and for accommodation, gratuities, meals, and all other travel expenses

22. WWM/Tigerair/Park Hotel Hong Kong will not abide claims, damages or liability of any kind,

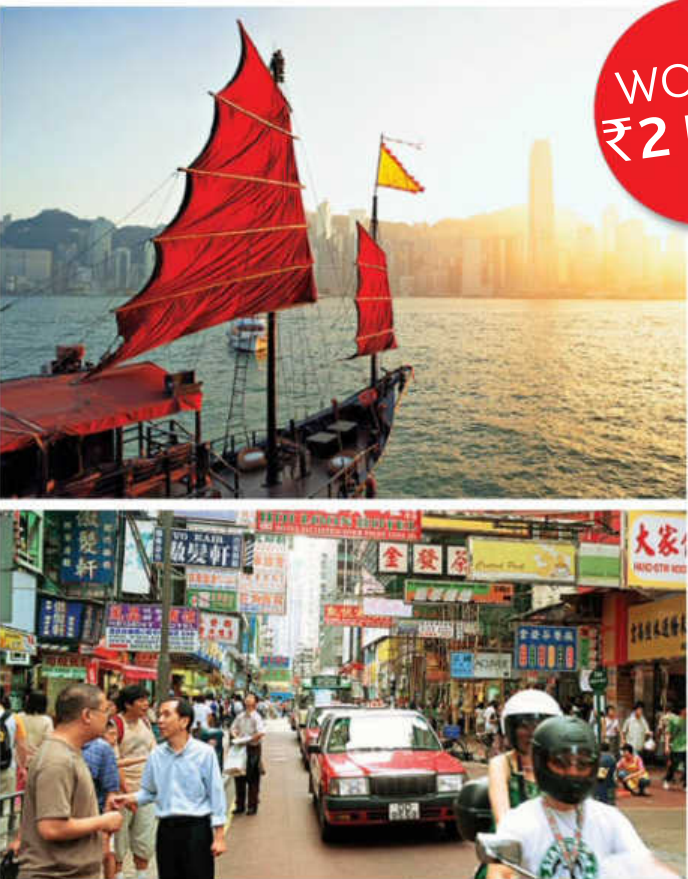
including personal injuries, death or property damages or any direct consequential, incident or other damages which the winner or anyone may suffer as a result of participation in this contest or the acceptance, use or misuse of the prize

23. WWM/ Tigerair/Park Hotel Hong Kong are not responsible if the contest cannot be redeemed due to war, terrorism, bad weather, strikes, riots, civil disruption, system failure or an act or God or the winner

24. Employees of WWM/ Tigerair/ Park Hotel Hong Kong and their relatives and business associates are not eligible to take part in this contest

25. The contest is open only to Indian residents aged 18+. The guest of the winner would also have to be an Indian resident aged 18+.

26. Other terms and conditions as applicable

WIN*Win a Romantic Getaway for Two in Hong Kong*WORTH
₹2 LAKH

Facing: With a glorious skyline and a multitude of experiences to enjoy, Hong Kong makes for the perfect romantic getaway

Park Hotel Hong Kong is strategically located in the heart of Kowloon's business and entertainment district of Tsim Sha Tsui



HONG KONG can be aptly described as an amalgamation of the East and West. This city of diversity, where the new and old meet at every turn, is known as Asia's World City and promises travellers a multitude of experiences. A few weeks, days or even hours spent in Hong Kong are sure to get you hooked onto this enigmatic city.

Movie buffs can pay a visit to **The Avenue of Stars**, which is a tribute to the names that helped make Hong Kong the 'Hollywood of the East', while giving visitors a panoramic view of the city's most iconic sight: its glorious skyline, dramatically set against **The Victoria Peak**. The Peak, as it is commonly known, is Hong Kong's highest point and offers a spectacular view of the city, a must-visit for every tourist.

Ocean Park Hong Kong, which blends entertainment with education and conservation, is a treat for marine life enthusiasts. Bring out the child in you at Disneyland, where you will embark on a magical journey through seven themed lands from day to night!

With over a hundred stalls of bargain clothing, accessories and souvenirs, the **Ladies' Market on Tung Choi Street** is where women can practise their haggling skills. Shopaholics can also indulge in retail therapy at the **Temple Street Night Market**, which is an enduring example of the theatre and festivity of a Chinese market.

On the other hand, couples can enjoy a stroll at the **Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade**, set against the view of the dramatic topographical and architectural spectacle **Hong Kong Island skyline**, which tower over the busy waters of **Victoria Harbour**.

A confluence of three religions, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, the **Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple** is known for its natural setting and ornamented buildings. **The Clock Tower**, now preserved as a declared monument, survives as an elegant reminder of the Age of Steam.

Complete your visit to Hong Kong with a day trip to **Lantau Island**, one of the ancient

fishing villages, and the place to say hello to the dolphins of the Orient.

Tigerair and Park Hotel Hong Kong are offering one lucky couple the opportunity to win a five-day/ four-night romantic getaway to Hong Kong via Singapore, the gateway to amazing destinations in the Asia Pacific. This prize also includes return airfare to Hong Kong on Tigerair via Singapore from any of the Tigerair destinations in India, namely Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Trichy.

Tigerair, a leading no-frills carrier based in Singapore, offers affordable travel options to empower travellers to explore new destinations. Tigerair operates 41 weekly flights to Singapore from five Indian destinations – Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli direct to Singapore. Tigerair connects to some of the most popular destinations such as Bali, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Perth and Taipei via Singapore.

With Tigerair's partner Scoot, Indian travellers can now also connect to amazing destinations in Australia and North Asia.

Tigerair's 'Tigerconnect' offers Indian travellers a seamless transfer facility to travel beyond Singapore without having to clear immigration or retrieve baggage, Which means Indian passengers can explore two destinations in one, without any additional visa costs.

Park Hotel Hong Kong is an established name and is strategically located in the heart of Kowloon's business and entertainment district of Tsim Sha Tsui. In addition to 347 guestrooms and suites, the hotel features dynamic dining and entertainment choices as well as a 24-hour internet corner. The Star Ferry, Kowloon Station for the Airport Express Trains and MTR station are a short walk away, providing easy access to the vibrant city.

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